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## Oddly Enough





# Oddly Enough

*By*

David McCord



"An arrangement in black."

—*Whistler*

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TO MY MOTHER  
THIS FIRST AND BEST  
OF ALL MY BOOKS



## Acknowledgment

Perhaps a third of these sketches first appeared on the editorial page of the *Boston Evening Transcript*. "Half Hours at Sea" (which is dedicated with considerable affection to the captain and crew of the *Nituna*) was originally published in *The New Yorker*. Of the rest, several have appeared in *Life*, and one in *Harper's*. For permission to reprint, I am indebted to the editors of these publications.

D. T. W. McC.





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## Oddly Enough





## The Hall Closet

IN our family the hall closet is a glorious and revered institution. It is the sanctum sacrosanct of the home. No one knows the full extent of its mysteries; no one has ever been entirely through it. It has never been cleaned out and probably never will be. It is the one part of the house that is at the same time quite public and intimately private. The week-end guest who has lost his leopard tie or his tennis shoes knows instinctively that he can (with sufficient patience and a little soft swearing) find them both in the hall closet. A guest of ours once disappeared just before dinner. We couldn't find him anywhere. We had dinner without him. Next morning he emerged in his bathrobe from the hall closet. He had a boiled shirt in his hand. He said he was sorry to be late for dinner but that he had lost that portion of his attire, and that experience had taught him where to look for it. We gave him some oatmeal and sent him home.

But if the hall closet is the public depository, how much more it is the private! Every winter there go into its lovely maw "just a few things we shall need" (oh, just a few). And every summer there go into it "just a few things we shall need" (fifty, say, or sixty). But winter or summer, I have never yet heard of any one of them coming out permanently. Why should they? I am sure it is a very restful place, and eminently respectable. Were I a left rubber or an odd chamois glove I should want no better grave. A simple spot, where style no longer has prestige and age may suffer not at all. Hook to hook, and generously consumed by identical moths, hang the baby's new sunbonnet and an ancient straw. Eye to eye, your second-best canvas golf bag and Tommy's skates. I mention these things at random for they are the sort of raw material that is forever available and never wanted in any hall closet. The better kind of stuff is there, of course, but the problem is to find it. If I ask (rather sharply), "Where is my new welterweight overcoat?" and the reply comes back (very faintly, too), "It's in the hall closet," I go out into the fog and slam the door behind me. If I say (and suspiciously),

## THE HALL CLOSET

"Where do you think my fishing trousers could be?" and I hear a low voice murmuring, "I put them in the hall closet last fall," I call up the fish and game warden and tell him that, so far as I am concerned, his trout are perfectly safe for another season.

Perhaps the day will come in our house when a competent group of organized charity workers may engage to help us clean out the closet in question. I should appoint myself captain and throw a light cordon of police around the porch, as one would about the unexcavated tomb of King Sneferuw (IV. Dynasty). Just to be on the safe side. It happened once to a friend of mine. He was quite poor, as a matter of fact, but after his hall closet had been emptied no one would ever have suspected it. Everybody (including cook) had new clothes. A few of them, apparently, dated back to the late nineties, but it was fairly evident that they had been little, if ever, worn. My friend even acquired an automobile, but I cannot possibly believe that he found that in the hall closet. It would be a trifle too much. Wouldn't it?

Children, unfortunately, have a heathenish way of cluttering up the hall closet with their

deadly paraphernalia. They have even kept snakes in ours. I imagine, in a way, that a hall closet is as safe a place as any for snakes. Especially in a house. But considering that a single green one cost us a parlor maid and an excellent cook (who was advised of the matter by a number of fearful screams), I must still regard a zoo as the only proper enclosure. And then the bicycle. A good bicycle in the country is a handy thing, particularly a light blue one, but in a hall closet, when one is grubbing for golf bottles and the thermos ball, two or three of these quaint vehicles are a step in the wrong direction. But they, indeed, are not yet so bad as a wheel chair. I have an uncle who lives (poor man) in a wheel chair. He is really quite fond of it. He visited me once, and his man kept his spare wheeler in — where do you suppose? Well, it blocked the entrance completely and effectively. If you had any things marked *ingoing*, you threw them in. If you wanted to get anything out, you simply didn't take a camera or carry your ivory-headed cane, as the case might be. You talked about them instead. And in rather strong language. When uncle finally departed, all of us made a great many interesting discoveries.



## THE HALL CLOSET

If you really want to go into our hall closet, the best way is to walk in backwards. It is quite dark inside. There hasn't been a bulb in the socket for years. In fact, I should have to light a match to discover where the socket is. It's on the left, I think; or perhaps the right. . . . But if (as I was saying) you walk in backwards, you experience a gradual fading away of external light; and instead of being fearfully confused by plunging into an unintelligible gloom, you are merely irritated because you can see almost everything that looks like the old humidor you are after, but not the article itself. The first physical step is, of course, one that will take you through the glass of your old college pictures. After that things move of themselves. Personally, I prefer the touch system. It means handling a vast quantity of strange matter and the gathering of many kinds of dust upon the hands. But it is an infallible method, and in the end very satisfactory. In all these years I have made only two mistakes. Once I took the telescope tripod for my old gray sweater, and on another occasion (imagine it) I thought an abandoned pair of handlebars was a meer-schaum pipe.



## Portage Canadien

ENVIRONMENT is everything. I should never carry a canoe except in the Laurentians. For a while I thought, and so did everyone else, that I should never carry it even there; but at last, with the help of old Goujon, it was settled on my shoulders, and I staggered off.

There are only two ways of portaging a canoe. One is to make a martyr of yourself, and the other is to let the guide do it. A good guide can walk faster with a canoe on his back than you can bearing your little Hershey bar. This is humiliating to a degree, and so one day when we were all going fishing, I picked one of the shorter carries (*carrays*, the guides will call them) and said rather firmly, although in French,

*“Je porte le canoe.”*

On the banks of a civilized lake the rest of them would have laughed, but in Canada a visitor is expected to make a fool of himself,

and the very fact that I chose the easiest way earned me not ridicule but respect. Only one person coughed.

"Short carry," I said.

"Two mile," said the guide.

I forget what I said.

Then, with a certain fatalism, Goujon began to tie the paddles to the middle thwart of the canoe. I knew that he could tie them either so as to fork my throat and ruin my shoulder blades, or so as to straddle the nape of my neck and put the whole hundred pounds on my spinal column. Being averse to torture, I asked him to tie them the last way. When he was all ready, the canoe was turned upside down and those "willing hands" one reads about that help the person in distress lifted it over my head and let me have it. I had tied two or three warm sweaters round my neck, but even so there was some pain. I said I was ready and thanked them all and shuffled my feet, indicating that I would be off. What I didn't understand was that the guides had been supporting most of the weight.

When I had been dusted off and helped up again, I set myself to steady the Woolworth Building. They gave it to me and threw the

Flatiron on for good measure, and I tottered drunkenly up the trail. There was a bad minute, I recollect, during which I lost my first wind. An hour later and a hundred yards farther on, I had it back and began to reflect a little on my position.

The most difficult thing about carrying a canoe is walking with it. Your head is up next to the floor from which you are refreshed with occasional drops of bilge. It is practically pitch dark, and all you can see are your own clumsy feet moving like snails, and the floor boards of a thick virgin forest rising impenetrably ahead. You are guided by instinct and Providence. I was guided by neither; and so I crashed a couple of trees and knocked off Goujon's hat. I had forgotten, of course, my citronella, and before I had gone a step I found myself host to a congress of mosquitoes.

*"Od's pittikins! can it be six mile yet?"*

Who said in gentle poetry that a *portage* is "a dark link in a silver chain"?

Who said . . . But life is too short for sayings.

"This is a beautiful trail," someone is marvelling. "Look up through there!"

They all stop to look and you bang (for it is anybody's canoe now) the lad in front of you and nearly split your jaw. He will perhaps argue as to whose jaw was split, or give an opinion on future splitting, but you will be saving your breath if you have any.

Going up hill you wish someone were pushing; going down hill you are sure that someone is.

"Are you pushing?" you say nastily.

"No, I'm trying to hold you back."

So if you are good enough, you will stop suddenly and sock him in the stomach. If you miss him . . . well, you sit down with an extra hundred pounds to keep you there.

Or perhaps they are fond of singing.

They may ask you to sing:

Au début de la vie,  
Lorsque j'avais vingt ans;  
O mon âme ravie,  
O mon cœur palpitant . . .

But this is the time when even the medieval charm of that old French and *habitant* song will not enthrall.

"*Od's pittikins! can it be six mile yet?*"

It is only half of one. How you did it you can never say. Your grandchildren will be less

ODDLY ENOUGH

able to explain. Yet somehow, bitten and soaked, with the sweaters riding snugly round your ears and the paddle blades deep in your skin, you stagger to the lake, a dark Iberian, tuckered and triumphant. Willing hands again will help, and some kind soul may suggest that you don't paddle. God knows you couldn't.

"I didn't think it was in you."

Feeling your shoulders, you are confident that it was.

About an inch.

*Lac Clair, P. Q.*

*July, 1926.*





## On What to Save

WE should all save something. Let us begin in the home. There is Junior, who is at the impressionable age. He is saving something. It is not pennies, I think, for he has found that the nail-file when united with a certain sly convulsion of the china pig will do the trick on Saturday afternoons. But it is stamps; an admirable habit. Most of us, as children, had a quiet fling with stamps. The books, with their rows of regular outlines where the fabulous spoils were to be pasted, pleased the fancy. I believe I knew, off-hand, the street address of the Scott Stamp and Coin Company, and I know that I frequently wrote them long letters about new issues from Venezuela. Some kindly old gentleman would answer these outbursts and show samples of his work; but I was a canny buyer. I preferred to trade. I think now that the great romance of stamp collecting hung about those queer, triangular wafers, the

stamps of the Cape of Good Hope. I thought them the strangest things, and the people the strangest people who could think in such geometric terms. To this day (Monday) the Cape of Good Hope represents to me nothing but the singular birthplace of the three-cornered stamp. Nevertheless, it is the imagined acquisition of one of these cocked-hat affairs that pins the lad to his hobby. Junior is saving stamps in the good hope that a Cape of the same shall one day be his. Give it to him and he will close the book forever. (Give it to him now.)

There are other things worth saving. The stitch in time is not very practical in our generation, but we have the daily and Sunday papers. Certain members of our household have been saving them for years. It seems that once *An Artical* was printed in one of them and someone put it away (or thought she did) to send on to Aunt Jane. But then one is never sure about these things; so they thought it a good plan to save all the papers for a few years, in case there was *Another Artical*. I believe there was once, but the thing was hushed up, and Aunt Jane continues to lead a blameless and uninformed

existence. Such papers are naturally sacred. They are the litter of literature and are not to be used to start the furnace fire. Yet ruin stares them in the face. Yesterday I had a secret conference with a ragman. You should have seen his pale eyes glitter.

Then there are the old clothes. Everybody has an old-clothes problem. Some (not I) have even a new-clothes problem, but everyone has at least an old. I have certain clothes which I have not worn for years and probably never shall again. Yet I am saving them, and I shrink from the thought of their ever being given away. There is that pair of tweed trousers, for instance. The last time I wore them someone tried to remove a feather and found it was a hole. Not a big hole, though. I shall not wear them again, of course, but I shall save them against an unlikely tweedless day. And besides, they keep a lot of idle moth balls happily engaged.

Recently, when I first began to think in earnest about saving, I thought hard over what we should save in case of a fire. I was in a good fire once (it was not my house), and I remember that everybody saved a lot of irrelevant marginalia and thought they were

doing a great piece of work. The climax came along when the ridge-poles were swinging into top form and somebody came running out with an old battered alarm clock. When the flushed hero's attention was called to the matter, triumph turned to contempt, and he threw it back where it would never ring again. (There is a little moral to be drawn from this, but you may draw it yourself.) And so, in considering what we should save in the event of fire, I made out a tentative list which began with my fly-rod and ended with a roll-top desk. When it was pointed out that the fly-rod is in the hall closet, and it takes one fireman or two janitors to move the desk, I gave it up. I have now submitted to the rescue committee (in case I am absent) a brief and simple memorandum: Item — One pair cuff-links (graduation present from Aunt Jane). Item — One slightly curled photograph of the largest trout (two pounds) I ever landed. Items — Choice of glass full of old razor blades or broken bicycle pump (for the pleasure of heaving it back.) One thing is certain: we shall save nothing that was acquired because we "saved" it. Once saved, enough. Let it burn.



## More Symposia

**H**AVE you ever been to a symposium? They are very interesting and liable to broaden one in a nice way. At those I have attended three or four scientists (they are generally professors) have spoken on a common subject. Each scientist represented a different field. For example, I went to a symposium on the moon. There was quite a crowd, I thought, for so technical a subject. First an astronomer got up and told us all about the moon, and that it wasn't really a big piece of cheese at all, and that the man in it was no more a man than a buggy ride, and that everybody, including him, was dead; until several disappointed old ladies in the corner began to sniffle and said that one of their loveliest childhood beliefs had been destroyed. Then another scientist got up. He was a geologist, and he told how the moon irritated the sea and got it to ebbing and raising tides, and a lot of other things which I didn't understand, and then he

had a drink and sat down. And just as I was reaching for my hat, another scientist that I hadn't seen before got up and said he was a professor of English; so he talked a long time about the significance of the moon in literature and art, and quoted *Endymion* awhile; and then I went home.

These symposia are amusing things, and I don't wonder that thoughtful people are taking them up more and more. If you have never been to one, perhaps the following little sketch will encourage you to go. Or it may just bring on your rheumatism again.

The subject for discussion at this particular symposium was of national importance; it was *Iced Tea*. I sat in the little lecture hall, on a hot June evening, between a rather fat woman and another rather fat woman. Two or three janitors dragged a tableful of apparatus on to the platform, and after they had all tried the buzzer which told the lantern-slide man when to put the pictures on upside down, and had placed a large pitcher of the subject on the lectern, the chairman arose and coughed and said that iced tea was an absorbing topic and that he felt it was so important that he had enlisted the three present speakers to talk



about it. There was Professor March, he said, who was a chemist; Professor Hare, a paleontologist; and Mr. Hatter, an optician. He himself, I thought afterwards, was an optimist. Their views on iced tea, the chairman explained, would be nothing short of revealing.

And so Professor March, who had caught his long, black necktie in the works of the apparatus, finally took it off and stepped forward to say that he — er — thought that this intelligent assembly would be — ah — interested in knowing what iced tea was — ah — er — *really* made of. It seems it is made of water and ice and Oolong tea-motes. A tea-mote, said the professor, is — er — very — ah — very small. As small as a —? O, *much* smaller than that! They are much livelier, too, he said, than — ah — bean-soup motes, which they resemble, though it is wonderful how those little rascals can get about in that — er — ah — viscidulous brew. Wouldn't the old lady in the front row like to see one? Sure she would. So the old lady (with a very uncertain voice) went up on the platform and applied her least watery eye to the lens manifold, and said *she* couldn't see anything except "a tremendous light." Professor March thrust his

head back among the wheels and retorts and stirred the Specimen Glass. The old lady then admitted that she "saw specks," but whether they were motes or tea-leaves or simply indigestion, I couldn't decide. After a small boy had had a look and said he thought he saw a fly, the professor decided he had better give up demonstration, and spent the balance of his allotted ten minutes discussing the electronic superiority of Oolong over English Breakfast. It was surprising, he said, how little the average iced-tea drinker knew of the physical composition of his beverage. I still think he's the kind of fellow who would peek inside an oyster.

So they finally smothered Professor March and then, as if one good turn didn't deserve another, the chairman got up and produced Professor Hare, "the well-known paleontologist," whose topic was *Pre-Cambrian Tea and Paleozoic Refrigeration*. During the glacial period, he said, ice was virtually a drug on the market and ice-picks had just been invented, but where they got the sugar from he was darned if he knew. Speaking for himself, he said, he always liked lots of sugar. "I remember the first time that iced tea really entered

## MORE SYMPOSIA

my field was one day when I upset a glass of it all over the manuscript of my book. Since then I have been more careful.”

I tried to force my way out at this point, but I was turned back just as the chairman was apologizing for Mr. Hatter, the famous nose and throat specialist. (It seems that he wasn't an optician after all.) “I have had many patients,” I heard him saying, “who have complained of the way ginger ale gets up their noses. I always say to these patients, ‘Why don't you drink iced tea?’ ” . . . But it was then that I thrust my umbrella between my teeth and crawled safely out under the doorman's legs.



## Concerning Clams

AS far as my friend is concerned, the subject of clams is under a definite cloud. A year ago he ate too many. All of us eat too many of something during our lives. Mine is doughnuts. What is yours? I often wish it had been parsnips or eggplant, for I hate 'em both. But it wasn't. It was doughnuts; and I was very fond of them. His was clams.

By chance they were steamed clams, too: the way he loved them, and the way I love them still. I tell him he would be partially consoled if he had gone out, so to speak, on *fryd* clams, and good riddance. But he didn't. He "went out" on steamed. I fear it is permanent, for it all happened early last summer, and today he shuddered when I mentioned General Crowder. He thought I said *chowder*.

His peculiar demise that will send him clamless to the grave was occasioned, I am happy to say, not by any ordinary hillside picnic,

## CONCERNING CLAMS

but by a clambake worthy of the name. This is at least some comfort. Die, he says, while Rome is burning or while the bees are yet loud in Innisfree. And so he chose the Trafalgar among clams. It was characteristic of him and "did him," in the Russet phrase, a deal of "credit."

A slight fog was blowing in, and the afternoon was cold. A dozen fires were burning, I was glad to see, when I first came upon the rocks. Over them, like a long table, yards of chicken wire supported thousands upon thousands of clams. My friend had just arrived, and silent among so many clients we surveyed the meal: the clams, the scores of lobsters, the eggs and sausages, and what not. For a long time we ate. Too long, as we later agreed. But under the conditions, with congenial people, and with a revenant Maine fog teasing our stretch of coast, and the tidal water slapping gently almost at our feet, we were carried to the zenith of epicurean delight. Carpenter and Walrus, the shells fairly rippled through our wet fingers, as their valvular content, stripped quickly of the small, black gaskets, followed one another in endless procession. It is then, with a tin of warm, drawn butter

at my side and a twist of kelp beneath my heels that I enjoy most the contemplative life of the riparian. Eating clams, the sea becomes more sedative and more like "the great liquid metronome" that Dr. Holmes called it. I thought of Llewelyn Powys on Governor's Island, "with the music of a sea-bell in our ears, a sea-bell belonging to a buoy in mid-channel, which caused to come over the water a sound of distant sadness, as though through fathoms of grey wintry depths we were hearing a dirge sung by mermen monks over the stiff fish-bones of a Neckan, who never, never again would sit upon a summer headland, 'the Baltic Sea along'." And so I remember eating, deep into the thickening fog.

I did not know until much later that anything had gone wrong. My friend is very reticent about such matters. We were driving slowly along the ebbing tidewater, and I was watching two or three men in long rubber boots who were digging far down the beach. "Clams," I said. Then, with some bitterness, he told me . . .

No one believes that there was ever a golden age of hot dogs. Their *status quo* is neither better nor worse, I imagine, for the

## CONCERNING CLAMS

prevailing frequency of roadside stands. But the clam, in America, is suffering a decline. "Fried clams (or *fryd* clams) to take out." On a leash, eh? A contributor to a learned column summed the business once and for all. He had seen, he wrote, a curious juxtaposition of signs. They read:

DANGER AHEAD  
FRYD CLAMS

It would surprise me were I to learn that the clam is venerated in literature. Didn't Aristotle include it among the edibles? I think so, but that is all I remember. The clam has no really great tradition. Unlike the Pelican, it does not, unfortunately, tear the breast to feed its young. Unlike the swan, it has no song of death. It does not even sigh like an oyster. It meant nothing to Priapus or Hebe, although in modern times a ballad recounts how Mary Ann McCarty made of it a golden fleece. Clams dwell in the mud which is, indeed, less than the dust. Only two poets, to my knowledge, have ever celebrated their charm:

O to have been brought up,  
sang Walt himself,

on bays, lagoons, creeks, or along the coast . . .  
 To continue and be employ'd there all my life . . .  
 I come with my clam-rake and spade, I come with  
 my eel-spear,  
 Is the tide out? I join the group of clam-diggers  
 on the flats.

Ah, what a joining! Think of that arrogant fellow, as we know him from his tintypes, leaning on his implements over the beds of unsuspecting mollusks, his hat so gravely at the Whitman angle. I only regret that the poem contains no record of the subsequent outrageous gastronomy.

The other tribute is Swinburnean:

If you were like clam-chowder  
 And I were like the spoon,  
 And the band were playing louder  
 And a little more in tune,

I'd stir you till I spilled you,  
 Or kiss you till I killed you,  
 If you were like clam-chowder  
 And I were like the spoon.

“‘Clam-chowder’,” added Rupert Brooke in a letter which managed to contain the above, “my God! what am I coming to?”





## On Packing Trunks

THERE are people in this world who will openly boast of the fact that they live in a trunk. I have known some whom I suspected of living in the tray, merely; but they, at least, never made it a grimy subject for braggadocio. "I spent the whole summer in a trunk," complains Miss Quinine, with an exhaustive sigh that would spring the lids of several. Unfortunate lady! in her case it did not matter. Not all the silks of Samarkand rustling in the hollows of an immaculate wardrobe could possibly make one mote of difference. She would still be pale Miss Quinine. But it is useless to tell her that she has mistaken inconvenience for deprivation, and organically confused the significance of taste and supply. She would never believe it. And besides, it would be unkind.

Whenever I feel that I am about to embark on a considerable journey, I hold a conference with myself on what shall accompany me.

"My trunk," I conclude. It is the customary and inevitable conclusion (a family tradition, almost), and I have no reason to be ashamed of it. But for a time it startles me, and I am utterly miserable. The day approaches; the hour, the minute. Somewhere, at last, I find the key; the cook has been using it to wind the kitchen clock. Somehow I drag the wretched baggage to the light. Ah, indeed, is there anything in the experience of man so meanly empty and hideously cavernous as a trunk that has to be filled? I believe not. Nor so morally depressing. I remove the tray. I lean over, fearfully; and the bottom drops down to the cellar. And if I am so foolishly careless (but I shall be) as to let fall into it a shoe, it will be an age before I catch the echo of a dull and leathern thud. A thud which, you may be quite sure, tolls me back to the awful process of packing.

A little tune creeps into the air as I commence. I have, truly, a high resolve; and ere long a higher pile of clothing on the floor. Article by article I lay it all away. I have never seen such a singular mess. I had always thought my attire rather decent, but here I discover the clumsy and ragged tatters of a

tramp. Can this ridiculous garment be my blue serge coat? Or these granulated bosoms, my own dress shirts? It is horrible, but they can, and are. And these strings, raveled and shoddy, these, too, are mine. They are my Sunday ties. In they go. In they all go. They must, alas! and I shall have to wear them for I possess no others. . . . Quietly, gradually, inch by inch, the bottom rises. It has reached the edge now, and I sit down of a sudden to see if I can remember what it is that I have certainly left out. A gentle giving and a quick rending of cloth brings it all back with a rush. I am sitting on it, of course. It is the tray.

Trunks, like pea pods, are supposedly dehiscent. That is, one thinks of them as one thinks of a swollen jacket, ready to burst on the vine and shower its contents in green salvos across the warm, receptive earth. One thinks so because one knows the tremendous potential force that is locked away under the final strap. The tray is the cause of it. Because it is light and buoyant, the tray is looked upon as an item wholly insignificant. It will carry only one's socks, shoes, handkerchiefs, pajamas, stationery, crackers, books, the portable typewriter, tennis balls, a bicycle kit, fishing

tackle, and articles too late to classify; so it really merits but small consideration. I am never able to prepare for its coming. The temptation to fill in above the wooden ears (the cleats, I am told) that are designed to support it is far too great. I balance it now, you see, perilously, on the topmost surface of a bathrobe, swelling softly out of its cradle like the more edible convexity of a soufflé hot from the oven. But unlike the soufflé, it will take force to get it down. And no end of care at the edges: wash-cloths, trouser legs, tassels, and other marginalia that are forever hanging out and needing to be tucked in. It will take weight and power, moreover, to get the lid closed. Three of us, I think. And all sitting, or perhaps pounding. The tray is the great trouble, but maybe it is worth it. A good tray is to a trunk what the larva of a moth is to the Mexican jumping bean. It is its life, center, and soul. The last thing in, it will be (with the proper internal resilience) the first thing out.

Tomorrow I shall be overjoyed to see my trunk. And I hope it contains my razor strop.



## An Imminent Chapter

THE fifteen years just gone, I fear, will go down in history as the period in which America sent her shock poets out to meet the beauty of the world. I fear it, principally, because it is a partial truth, and history teaches that the partial truth is the truth the historian is after. So there will be a long chapter about it and the tide of American poets in the early twentieth century, the fields they crossed, and the strange harvest they brought in. There were no end of poets, it will say, and there was no end to most of their poems. And then will develop a beautiful discussion of schools and movements, form and substance; of the various "isms" and all sorts of disagreeable technicalities. And we shall skip all that and look at the last paragraph, and read an absolving statement. It will declare, I feel sure, that "diverse and diffuse as was the poetic energy in the years between 1910 and 1925, and separate as lay the paths

on which the poets chose to walk, yet it was a period of honest toil and pioneering, and it laid the foundation for the poetic ascendancy that was to follow." That is the way of the world, as Congreve said. We spend our lives laying foundations and paving the way; and then the next fellow comes along and plants one foot on our foundation and the other on our paving, and what does he do? He lays another foundation and paves another way.

So in these fifteen years the American poets have been almighty busy with their corner-stones. A quantity of bricks have been laid, and the dust has got into a good many people's eyes. The air is full of poetry; or full, at least, of what pass for poems. It is not as if Beauty (we must remember the capital) stood in the open for the first time. She has been there, the Greeks, the Hebrews, and the Chinese assure us, these many years. It is not, even, that we have failed to perceive her. It is something more exciting than that. It is the fact that a vast army of young men and young women have felt the impulse to transfer to pad and the backs of envelopes (where Barrie wrote his early plays) some suggestion of the lovely apparition they have seen. "Beauty!"

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they cried. Good! The starving anthologist is saved. "Beauty!" Excellent; that is the main thing. They have seen her in the fairest hour of the fairest day: sitting under a tree, diving into a pool, wallowing in the pigsty, or rising in a gray cloud from the ash-can. What matter where? What matter how? If Smith's ash-can impression was more perfect than Jones's vision under an elm, then Smith got the check, and Jones wiped his glasses and had another look. But let us not dwell upon the horrors that have been committed lately at the very foot of Parnassus. Let us not dwell on them. Let us post them away silently and with all speed in one of their own dreadful vehicles:

This is thin stuff.  
This is fragile stuff.  
This is thin and fragile stuff.  
Thin, it is fragile;  
Fragile, it is thin.  
Thin stuff,  
Fragile stuff;  
Fragile,  
Thin.

There will be, surely, certain high lights in the chapter. I hope especially for an adequate discussion of what Mr. Christopher Morley

has dutifully called "The J. Gordon Coogler school of poetry." I hope, too, for a word about the eccentrics, the Dialects, whose consummate egoism is hidden ingenuously behind a small and dotted "i." A photograph of one of them will help. Let us have him, complete, with horn-rimmed glasses and typewriter (center), a geranium (right), and the barest excerpt of *Cosmos* in front of him. Just enough to make him feel at home. His name should appear underneath; but I think all the capitals in it might be omitted. And it should, of course, be printed upside down.

Then I shall want to see a cross-section of the Ruthless poets, the wilful diluters of Hippocrene, filing enormous through the Chicago stockyards or coughing violently in the smoke and glare of a rolling mill. A few puddlers may be looking at them, and sickly but salient smiles will cross their faces. "Beauty," they are crying; "Beauty!" Loudly and through the nose. And I shall hope for a glimpse of the imagists, the frozen-fire boys, stretched out behind the coat-tails of a roaring transcendentalism, or perishing vicariously in a splendor of words. And I shall listen for the solemn fall of tears where youth-



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ful sniffers, the insufficient sweeties of rhyme, are clasping and unclasping hands, lighting spills and waxen tapers, and taking remarkably to heart a little trouble they ran across one day in Dostoëvski. I shall look for them all, the pale and the blooded, the full and the by, the macabre and jazz. And, with due self-restraint, I shall keep their secret.



## Half Hours at Sea

*"Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing — absolute nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."*

*— The Wind in the Willows.*

### I

CLEAR the battens," yelled the first mate.

"Certainly," I said. "If there is anything I like to see, it is good, clear battens. Where are they?"

I don't recall the exact answer. It contained some general information and several nautical terms. It appears, however, that the battens are *in* the sail (or should be). They are a kind of slat to stiffen it. A common sailor's phrase has arisen: "Slatting about."

I laughed over my error. It is just as well to laugh at such times. Above all, on our boat.

"I thought battens were what you nailed the hatches down with," I explained, when I could control myself again. "All big vessels, I

have heard, carry no end of hatches well battened down; and coolies under the hatches. Have you any coolies under the hatches, captain?"

The captain did not answer. The mainsail, which had been partly run up, came down on him at that moment on the lee side and he was completely and inarticulately folded away in a billow of canvas.

When he reappeared he said one or two important things, but there was no immediate reference to my question. I did not seem to care to repeat it. It was my first venture at cruising.

Worse than that, it was almost my first time aboard any sailing boat at all.

So naturally, in my clean white ducks, I felt very new at it. I even felt a trifle inferior, though I had known the crew (on land) for years.

It was quite a windy afternoon. Too windy, I thought. I was about to suggest as much, and that we start the cruise in the morning and have a last, quiet night ashore and leave the gale to windmills and nature, but I sensed, even then, what is a peculiar trait of mariners: that the more it blows the more they are for

it. So I undid my necktie and looked around for action.

There was plenty of it.

The navigator I detected at the foot of the mast, up to his ears in rope. The bos'n was still having a little innocent fun with the battens. The sail was gradually going up. The glass (at the same rate, I believe) was going down. Only the captain was making suggestions.

He looked at me. (I was supposedly the guest of the captain for a pleasant week's cruise, but he often forgot it.)

"Go below and coil the halyards," he said in his abrupt way. The peak and throat halyards, I believe he called them.

I stumbled below. Somewhere in the half-light I came upon a tangle of rope that suggested inventory day on Brooklyn Bridge. I began to coil it.

You may not know it, but mariners are extremely sensitive about the art of coiling rope. It is a sacred art. It is one of the great prides of a hideous profession. Their knotty hands have a compelling, even a soothing, way with rope, and by a few arbitrary passes the most kinky strands of it are made to fall with a truly marvelous grace into beautiful

consecutive loops, as a cobra might arch its head under the spell of an insistent pipe.

I sorted out a length suitable for my design (about five hundred yards, at a guess) and began slowly to wind it concentrically over my right arm. In a kinky and rebellious way it tolerated the crude process until my arm became overloaded. Something had to be done. But what? I tried to slip out of it softly and take the coils by surprise. But you cannot surprise rope. It is thoroughly vigilant; and extraordinarily stubborn. I did various things with it, and finally dropped the whole mess on the floor. Then with a sharp curse I kicked it. I did, really.

That was a mistake. In the first place, my foot became rather entangled and made the end of the rope impossible to find. And further it rendered the entire length with which I had been working irritable and acrimonious. Yet I began again. This time I decided to coil it on the floor as I had seen the captain do it. After one or two bad starts I discovered that it went much better thus until I got so dizzy circling about that I had to sit down on a bunk.

There the bos'n found me, gazing sadly at the little pool of halyard.

"You've done it all wrong," he said with private satisfaction. "It goes the other way. Give it here."

I gave it.

So it appears that a rope, a common rope, a mere twisted rope smelling of tar and other vulgar substances, is like a watch: unless it is wound and going the right way it is of no use at all.

Silently the bos'n toiled.

I fell into a contemplative mood and carried the speculation out into wider fields. How like life! Of how little use is anything in this world unless it is going in the right direction: soup, the morning train, the week-end guest, fifty-five shares of Boston common.

I smiled at the parallel.

Then I was ordered on deck.

## II

IF you are not familiar with a sloop, you have no idea how hard it is to make one's way about on her. I think ours (I am a guest on it) is a fairly large one, forty feet over all or on the water line, I don't recall which. As a matter of fact, the "water line" and "over

all" are synonymous terms, for half the time on a brisk day the water line is over all, including my feet.

I mention the cabin first. You can stand up in the cabin. That is, you can stand up in one place (where there is a small skylight) if you are short enough. I am six feet three. Any cabin (according to the international yachtsmen's code) provides standing room if there is a skylight or a glass-covered hatch above. The sloop salesman removes his yachting cap or bowler hat, according to whether he is selling you the boat in the store or on the hoof, pokes his head up into the hatch and the cobwebs and mumbles indistinctly, "Yes, indeed, madam, this is a comfortable cabin with full head room," etc. And he usually gets away with it. The trouble is that on our boat the shaving mirror, the barometer, the life preservers, my extra shirt, and the alcohol stove are distributed in strange places that necessitate crawling to them on all fours. So nobody does much standing below deck. We have practically forgotten how.

Not that we lie down. I have what they call a bunk up for'ard just beyond the stove and not quite inside the bowsprit. There are

## ODDLY ENOUGH

one or two other things close by, such as a collapsible lifeboat, a spare anchor from the *Leviathan*, and the rest of the cable that was not laid across the Atlantic. The bunk folds up against the hull and is held in position by the anchor. There is no danger of its coming down. This is called the "rest" position. The captain has said in my hearing that when we have found a new home for the anchor (about a hundred fathoms, I hope), the bunk will be lowered, and I may go to bed. I have just about forgotten how to do that, too.

It is really more dangerous on deck. There is the boom, for instance: a variable quantity, never to be taken lightly. It is the small horizontal telegraph pole that "comes over" when your mind (but not your skull) is elsewhere. On the sea you speak a great deal of *clear* and *clearing*. You say "We cleared the harbor," or "We cleared the deck," or "It's a clear day." Well, when one is in the cockpit the boom, too, is supposed to have a certain clearance. I have never discovered what it is, exactly. A split hair, I expect. I have yet to hear the expression, "It cleared my head."

Another reason why sailors don't wear silk hats is that they are forever tilting their



heads back to look aloft. If you think that the gathering of blocks and tackles and jigs and scupper-plugs on deck is cumulative, turn your eyes heavenward to the masthead and behold the legacy of the ship chandler. The navigator has told me that he is really watching the narrow span of mainsail snug to the mast where the wind leans affectionately. But I know better. He is looking at the dim cluster of snuffer-clippers and doodads whence depend these several Jacob's ladders and this Maypole festoon of hemp. He is proud of it and wants you to see it too. He says he has been up there; and I look at his trousers and know that it is true. I can easily imagine with what delicacy and reverence he ran his fingers over the metal surfaces, and with what priestly care he laved them with gouts of magic oil. Him I could envy at his worship. By just so much is a sailing vessel the least bit Gothic, and man, in that realization, lifts his eyes and mind from the clutter closing in upon his feet to where all things taper to a single point. *Bonum est contemplari.*

I feel pretty ennobled myself.

## III

THE boat was rolling about in a great calm.

"I think," said the navigator, with a kindly yet not exactly admiring glance in my direction, "that we had better teach this young fellow something about ships in general."

"Right," agreed the mate a little too eagerly. "I'll do it myself."

I expressed what I considered adequate appreciation.

The calm continued.

"The first thing," began my enthusiastic mentor, "is to acquire a fundamental knowledge of the different types of boats."

I remember a dairyman who paused once in the middle of a fragrant barn to tell me something of the sort about the different kinds of cattle.

A cow kicked him.

"Given a ship and the sea side by side," continued the mate, "I dare say even you could tell them apart."

I thanked him. (It is just like knowing the soap from the bathtub.)

"But there are still nicer distinctions."

"Such as picking you out from a half dozen lobsters," I suggested.

He did not seem to hear.

"Some of them are easy and some are hard. For the moment you might profitably confine your attention to four."

"Lobsters?" I asked.

"Ships," he replied.

"Good," I said. "What four?"

He cast about for illustration.

"I suppose you understand what a sloop is; I mean, what is meant by a sloop?"

"Yes," I said.

There was an awkward silence.

"A sloop has — er — only one mast."

"Yes," I said, looking at it.

"H'm-m-m."

The mast rocked in gentle encouragement. It was a good mast and I clung to it.

The mate inspected his pipe. In crises at sea people turn to tobacco.

"Anything with two or more masts is a schooner."

No one objected.

Somewhere a sea gull screamed.

The mate gazed off into space. Not a sail on the horizon.

"Go on," I urged.

"Except a yawl," he finished importantly.

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"A yawl would be a sloop but for having a jigger mast abaft the tiller or thereabouts."

I weighed the enormity of that.

How many fine sloops, I thought, have been ruined by having a jigger mast abaft the tiller or thereabouts!

*Thereabouts!*

I boiled over.

"Why aren't they more specific and definite? Why don't they say 'abaft the tiller' and stick to it? How are you going to locate an undergrown mast that is no more accurately recommended than *thereabouts*? That's the trouble with your blasted sea. It's so large and expansive, and all your boats and tackle are so damned indefinite. Grab the mainsheet and what have you got? Nothing but a rope. And a dirty one," I added, glancing at it. "Show me a yawl! Let me see it with my bare eyes!"

Even the captain was impressed.

Half an hour later we sighted one.

"Yonder," said the mate, like an Aladdin who has just rubbed the lamp.

I gazed at the misshapen thing with pity.

"Do you mean," I asked, "that if I were to raise the boat hook" (one of the few basic

marine objects I can readily identify) "abaft the tiller and tie the captain's napkin to it we should become a yawl?"

The bos'n nodded sadly.

"Unless the captain saw you. He's childishly fond of his napkin and not at all partial to yawls. I wouldn't try it."

"All right. I won't."

"The fourth class," the mate continued, "should give you no trouble."

"Why?"

I thought I should say that. It made me seem conveniently ignorant.

"Because there are no junks this side of China. At the rate we've been moving this bright morning I doubt if we are even abreast of the Philippine Islands."

I turned my head. The mate was leaning out to sea.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing.

The bos'n strained his blue eyes.

"That," said he, "is a lighthouse."

"To the left of it, I mean."

"That is Nellie, the beautiful lighthouse keeper's daughter. Surely you've heard of her?"

## ODDLY ENOUGH

"No," I said. "To the left, but not far astern."

The bos'n searched carefully.

"By George, I believe it's the mate. He's fallen overboard."

"I believe he has," I said without much emotion.

## IV

AN unimportant wave broke teasingly over the bow.

We came about, and so did the conversation.

"How many kinds of sails are there?" I asked innocently.

It was a terrible remark.

The crew looked thunderstruck. No one had ever asked them that before. I saw first off that not one of them knew.

They considered a long while.

Then the navigator looked at the jib and at me (but more at me than at the jib) and smiled faintly.

"Several," he said.

A cautious remark.

But not satisfactory.

"I have noticed," I began at once, "that we are using two pretty continuously. This

mainsail here, which seems important to keep the boom in action, and that confounded jib up front for which I see no use whatsoever except to provide exercise for tight-rope walkers and high divers."

Another wave slid contented down the deck, and the bos'n jibed with abandon.

"Captain," I said sternly, "you have been holding out on us. Only this minute I have put down a book on yachting that contains a large folded picture of a sloop in three colors (blue, green, and dead-crab red) and its official rigging. According to a most agreeable account which accompanies it, a sloop (emphatically a sloop) should be the one thing in the world to carry a large overhead."

We shipped a little water.

"Where is our spinnaker? Why isn't it up and flying?"

"Because, you ass, we're not running before the wind."

That struck me as exceedingly careless. Here we were, crawling out at 3 A.M. every morning, early enough to see the stars washed out of the sky and too early to shave, and not even getting a good enough start to run before the wind. Deplorable, I thought it.

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We shipped a little more water.

"And how about the balloon jib? I haven't seen *that* around anywhere unless it's what I've been using for a laundry bag."

I drummed a little tune on the backstay. The captain is very strict about the backstays and has them all set at A flat.

"And as for the club topsail" — I gave a sardonic laugh.

"This isn't a club," gargled the mate. "And if it were you wouldn't be elected."

This sentiment was repeated in different forms.

I went aft and sat in the tender. There was some discussion about cutting me adrift.

"I wouldn't do that," I said, shaking my head.

"Why not?"

"It's nearly *children's hour*." (A very necessary hour on our good ship).

The bos'n made a noise like cracked ice in a glass.

"So much the worse for you," was his reply.

And he smacked his lips audibly.

"No," I said. "I've the key to the ice-box in my pocket."



## HALF HOURS AT SEA

### V

WE were hunting for whistling buoys.

I stood for'ard as the lookout, peering stupidly through the dull haze. I sighted a couple of empty bottles and the tray of a trunk.

The captain thanked me elaborately. But his heart wasn't in it. He didn't seem to care for them.

"You don't *sight* a whistling buoy," he explained. "You *hear* it."

A sane proposition.

"What does it usually whistle?" I asked.

"Red Hot Momma," said the mate.

The captain fixed him with sad eyes.

"It just whistles," said he. "As if it had a pain."

"Good," I replied. "I've got one myself. I'll have an ear for it."

For the next hour I shut my eyes and listened.

At last the captain shuffled alongside.

"Hear any?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes," I answered, smiling. "Two or three."

"What!" he roared. He has a three-ply roar.

"Honestly," I insisted. "The last one was

about a mile off there, I should say." And I pointed pleasantly at a section of haze that Hamlet's ghost might have easily enjoyed. "I didn't like the sound of it."

Nor did the Captain like the sound of what I said.

"You egg-head landlubber, don't you know we wanted it?"

"No," I replied vaguely. "What for?"

"We're lost; that's what for."

A ponderous thought. I believe I shuddered. However . . .

"Well, perhaps we are," I said stoutly. "But I should get small comfort out of a buoy like that. Now if it came of a musical family —."

The captain swore exhaustively. He can do it, too.

Then he stopped the poker game, and the crew went into conference. They do that sometimes, even on board ship. The results are about the same as on land.

The navigator said something about laying a new course to pick it up. I offered no suggestion, nor was I called upon for any. I was quite sure that he couldn't mean to "pick up" the buoy literally; but if he did, I hoped

he wouldn't stow it in my bunk. There was an anchor there already. I was positive, however, that when he heard it he would let it alone.

There arose some additional talk that threw light on the problem. We could all hear the buoy now. A low, lugubrious sound.

"We want to get a bearing from it," said the navigator, kindly, for my benefit.

I expressed interest as a mechanic. My mechanical flair is always asserting itself.

The mate grinned at me.

"Don't you want to get the bearing yourself, Admiral Sims?" he said.

I told him modestly that I didn't know much about such things.

So the mate winked wickedly at the navigator.

"We'll let him row out for it," he said. "It'll be a fine experience."

"Be sure you pick a nice one, Nelson," cautioned the bos'n.

"A nice what?" I asked.

"A nice bearing, of course. A good, smooth one."

"It will be a touching ceremony," mused the navigator. "I can see it so clearly. The

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captain will run up the colors, and the bos'n will play the 'Star-Spangled Banner' in his quaint way on the wrong side of the harmonica while we all stand at attention. And just then the boom may possibly come over to see what it's all about. I wouldn't miss it for a new compass."

Even the captain had a word.

"You'll find them in a little box on the top of the buoy."

"And don't forget to drop a dime in, Decatur. It's the customary fee."

I cursed them all roundly and went on deck.

I could see it now, a latticed cone, rising and falling gently on the oily swell. At intervals it exuded the sourest blasts I ever hope to hear. I felt not only lost, but engulfed in misery.

"Blooming turtledove," I said.

## VI

IT was a pea-soup fog.

The sea, under any fog, is a dull place, but I had never seen it quite so dull, for the mainsail, even, refused to flap. Agreeably

muffled, many miles across the slick, sounded the sweet explosions of a lobster boat: the soft catarrhal assurance that industry still throve. Near at hand boomed the less sweet snoring of the mate. The mate considers that fogs give him the unconditional right to slumber. It is largely for this reason that I dislike them.

"Fog rolling in," sniffles the bos'n.

The mate, bless his little heart has gone below. He is lovely in his sleep.

At the same time, there is an engaging amount of danger. Not from the mate, lest you misunderstand, but from the fog. The captain had sensed it already.

"We may be run down," he observed.

"I *am* run down," I said, toddling toward the hatch. "I'm sick of living on boiled lobster and weak tea. And I need more sleep."

"Stop!" bellowed not one voice, but three.

I groaned.

During fogs (need I say it?) I am given a tin horn such as I blew upon, temperately, in childhood; and commanded to shriek an ominous warning from the bow. A small boy would laugh at such a noise, but a thousand-ton vessel, I am told, will shudder.

In a fog at sea all sailing ships have the right of way, or else the tugs and excursion boats. One or the other; I forget which.

It was indeed a pea-soup fog. I blew heavily for half an hour.

At the end of that time the mate had awakened, the cream had turned sour, the bos'n was writing to his grandmother, and I was drained of saliva.

Broad on the beam, the *Southport* whistled. I blew some water out of the horn, and we came about. Then we all strained our ears for the sound of the engine.

There is no form of ventriloquism so amazing as that of a steamer whistling in a fog. You reckon it dead ahead, and it roars out but a boat's length astern; it bears down from the port side, and towers over you from the starboard. When a steamer whistles in a fog, a prayer is worth more than the wheel.

The *Southport* toyed with us for ten minutes until I was a nervous wreck, and then shot across our bow without a murmur, while its captain gazed down upon us and quidded placidly to the sea.

When the swearing had died down somewhat, and the bos'n could speak English

again, I stole away to my old position for'ard. I lifted my eyes, and the fog with them.

There is no lovelier sight than a fog lifting at sea. The dark speck of rusty gold two points on the weather bow turns out to be an orange, and this great quartering halo of light dissolves into an unemotional can-buoy. Even that stalwart figure at the tiller (as I told him) passes from a Viking silhouette into nothing more than the navigator soberly peeling his nose.

With the lifting of fogs, the illusive and the beautiful harden into reality. Oranges, it is fair to add, no more than navigators.

"Tug and three tows," I announced, conning the sea for what it held. "Four points off the bos'n's wash."

"Glass and three fingers hard astern," piped the mate, who had somehow waked up.

With a sigh, I left the tug and its barges and slipped easily aft to where the captain was doing a Rebecca at the well.

## VII

"POLISHING brass," observed the bos'n, applying an old rag to a small can, "is not much fun."

Nobody had said that it was.

"The trouble is," I replied, "you've never tried it before. Now I've been polishing steadily since I came aboard, and I can say truthfully that the second week is much better than the first. You begin to eliminate things. For instance, it was only last Wednesday that I stopped polishing the stove because I found it was made of iron. Knowing the cook's habits (I squinted at the navigator), I had assumed it was dirty brass."

"Speaking of unskilled labor," the mate reminded me unpleasantly, "I thought you were going to wipe down the jib that first morning. I can still see where you rubbed all the varnish off the hatch-cover. You might have done my shoes while you were at it."

"I offered to do the captain's watch and his wedding ring, only he seemed insulted. Didn't you, Captain?"

Apparently he did; and so I looked at my nose in the binnacle flange and rubbed it some more.

"I wonder," I mused, rubbing, "what the other side of brass looks like? I expect to work through this by tomorrow."

"If you don't rub any harder than that,"



murmured the mate, "you won't even take the polish off the rag. Don't forget to squeeze it back into the can when you're through; if we were half capable of your efficiency, an ounce of brass polish would last fifty cruises."

"Well, anyway," said I, "I wouldn't spend the best part of a forenoon trying to see a face like yours in the round end of a scupper-plug. The reward is too small."

For a while we rubbed with abandon.

"To-night," announced the captain suddenly, while the atmosphere was still tense, "we go ashore."

Dolphins and porpoises broke water for miles around.

"Not," I asked with the Bernhardt catch, "ashore?"

"Ashore."

"What have I done to deserve this?" I begged.

"Nothing," said the captain. "But I'm afraid to leave you aboard — even locked in the cabin. You might fall into a sea-bag."

"But we'll let him row us ashore in the dinghy. That summer-boarder stroke ought to go well against a strong tide."

"If I am a burden," I began.

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"No burden, only a guest," the captain assured me.

The degree of difference is very subtle. The captain alone can define it accurately.

"And we'll go to the movies."

"Something inspiring; eh, mate?"

"A good smashing nature reel," suggested the navigator. "About the growth of water lilies, say."

"*Benneneroil!*"

"And a temperance picture for the captain. I'm afraid the voyage has done him no good. Did you hear him say the other day that one Sauterne deserves another?"

The captain swallowed hard.

I whistled a bit of an old shanty; the mate helped me out with the chorus.

"And there will be real food: out of cows and gardens and kitchens instead of cans with fat tomato labels."

"Ah, yes," agreed the mate, smacking eloquently his unshaven lips, "I could die happy with a shore dinner. And how I once reviled them!"

"Well," I said, my old cheerfulness returned, "I must dress for this."

"There's a law requiring it, even here."

## HALF HOURS AT SEA

"I shall wear my white flannels, and the captain's canvas shoes (it will strengthen his arches to go barefoot), and the mate's Commodore cap, and that nice little blue tie of the bos'n's. Bos'n, where did you say you put it?"

"I didn't say. But if your eyesight were a little better, you'd see that I have it on."

"So you have. But I shouldn't have detected it," I said, "in such wretched surroundings and against such a dirty background. Why don't you wash it?"

"The tie, you libelous defamer?"

"No, the background."

Fortunately I dodged the heavy object which passed, splashing, into the sea.

"But before you do," I concluded, "let me say I am going below and for'ard to commit myself to sleep."

Amid a shower of compliments and well-wishes, I descended.

"We'll endeavor to keep her afloat, Farragut," leered the last voice.

I pulled the little green curtains that shut me away.

"Call me at Altoona," I said.

*Eggemoggin Reach.*  
*July, 1924.*



## Immortal Words

**W**HENEVER I find a man in print referring with a large, rhetorical flourish to some particularly horrible stanza of some particularly lame and vulnerable poet of the past, I know instinctively that he is a dull fellow and I turn the page at once (if I find him in a newspaper) or throw the wretched book away (if he is in a book). Life is too short for his opinion. It is too short for the opinion of anybody who has not the seeds of true poetry thick in his heart. Those who are not so blessed should conceal the wicked fact. He says, this ponderous individual: "And in the immortal words of Q——." And then we have a whole stanza of Mr. Q's, such as we learned for public recital at school, or even worse, and our mouths are left full of the dry, powdery syllables and a taste as of false fruits of Parnassus. Immortal words! Who is he, indeed, to say that such piffle will survive the page that first bore it? You may

safely wager that these quaintly styled immortalia represent at once the beginning and end, the zenith and nadir, of our friend's fund of "poetry." A poet is a poet to him. The award of the title bears its own conviction. The standards of taste, the strictures of judgment, are lost upon him. Q——, in his day, was called a poet by many. Well, Nero was once called Emperor.

Immortal words! All words, if rightly said and allocated, are to a degree immortal. The dictionary is full of such. Blake and Coleridge flung them about in their feverish brains. Keats played with them audibly as with the more permanent toys of an immortal childhood. Swinburne, amid the relics of Dunwich, beaded them together into a fierce, sweet music more accurately rhythmic than anything in the language. And you and I have turned the sly trafficker at times and set up our little runs and cadences, and read a few things into them that we secretly believed to be of the immortal die. Dear, departed thought and idylls; we never wrote them down. There was one (how did it begin?) that was better than the rest . . . but forgotten, I fear, as nearly all great things are

finally forgotten. Shelley's notebooks, Poe's philosophies of composition; these we never had. Such trivia have never buoyed or strengthened our passing thought and fancy. No Boswell has ever caught us, roaring, in the middle of an inextricably immortal phrase. Yet we have had our moments, and been, it is quite true, nearer the mute inglorious Miltons than Gray would ever dream. Only, when our imagination was most fertile and we felt clearest the tingle of genius, and committed those monstrous witticisms and compacted those marvelous epigrams, it was not strange men from Porlock who blundered in on us to ask mundanely for a cigarette or to inquire solicitously whether our putting might be improving. With a startled cry we awoke and sat up in our chair, gazing vaguely, pleasurably, back upon a drift of wonderful words that were surely, as we dreamed them, immortal. And then we slowly wound the clock and went to bed.

Immortal words! When we were children they fell from all our tongues. Silly and wise, vulgar and lovely, they raveled together our desperate comedy of life. It was the bright, unconscious, unpremeditated art; not a pre-

cious speech, but a timeless flow of ah! what relevant thoughts; a fearless baring of what sturdy and valiant hearts! Or, when the mood was on us, we worked miracles with our comfortable old language, and brought alive into the light such queer pronunciations and impossible nouns as we shall never reproduce. The blessed compositor who gave to Carroll through his errors the suggestion of such pungent things as "slithy," "borogoves" and "frumious" really but aped our trade. Spooner was a weak one beside us.

The nearest approach to a record of our little immortelles lies in the one or two traditional, boyish phrases and misnomers that have been too adequately preserved by an odd cousin since the day when we first uttered them at the tea-table or after supper. What a shout there was when we asked the meaning of (as we innocently called it) "undurfed," in two syllables. The word, as we pointed it out in the book we were reading, turned out to be actually a three-syllable affair: "underfed." I distinctly recall saying "physo" for "psycho," because there was, when I was saying it, a daily comic strip appearing in some newspaper and called "Psycho and

Sap." What a volume there might be of the strange shades and nuances we gave to common-place words. We made "misled" rhyme with "grisled," and "awry" was "*awrie*," and "Stephen" was "Step-hen"; and many other things which were wrong persisted in our fancy, and we continued to say them even though we had been severely and painfully corrected. Sometimes it was not a word, but a wise, illumined phrase. "Hallowed be thy Name" was "Hallowed B., thy Name" — nor were we ever vouchsafed the last! And still again—for daily we touched hands with religion — Thy kingdom's name was *Come*.

Immortal words! What compendiums, too, could be bound about the abnormal and weird connotations we gave to grand old phrases of dignity and purpose. I recollect how queer I thought were certain constructions in two Christmas carols which I once warbled in a light, irresponsible treble. "The first Noël," it begins, "the angels did say, was *to certain* poor shepherds in fields where they lay." "To certain," I had no doubt, was then a verb, and a transitive one at that. I often pondered how it was managed, and how one, if the occasion arose, "*certained*"



## IMMORTAL WORDS

shepherds; whether lying idly in the fields, or leaning obliquely, as all shepherds should, on their several staves. And there was the other:

O tidings of comfort and joy.

That, I was sure, expressed a manifest and kindly interest in bedclothes, and I never doubted for a moment that the comfort mentioned was not identical with the one that lay, neatly folded, where it could be pulled out to its full extent on just such a cold winter's night as the one when Noël was busy certaining his quota of men.

Then we were stanch pioneers in imagination and wonder. Then we were the "illuminati, eating silently, our heads full of plans and conspiracies." Likewise, full of words far more nearly immortal than the poor and pale strains which our correspondents and authors may unearth from among the littler bards. Immortal; only, of course, as I have already said, they were never precisely written down.

*Georgetown.*  
*January, 1926.*



## Of Serious Questions

I AM often confronted by serious questions. The other day a man said to me suddenly:

“What *is* art?”

“This,” I replied, showing him some nice sketches I had been making on the telephone pad. Unfortunately he was at the other end of the line and couldn’t see. But he knew what I meant.

And then on another occasion I was taking a long walk with my friend T. T. We had been laughing light-heartedly when, with practically no warning at all (or perhaps T. T. did suggest that I try to be less of an ass), he observed:

“Have you the least idea where we are?”

“Of course,” I said, having none.

(I think we spent the night there.)

Serious questions like these arise every day. One must always be prepared to meet them. I never make long answers. They impede

## OF SERIOUS QUESTIONS

the process of reason. "Yes," I say, evenly.  
Or "No."

These little courtesies abound in a fertile brain. I release mine according to the demand, though I usually limit myself to one serious answer for each serious question. You may make any number of frivolous answers, for frivolity breeds on frivolity. But one serious answer is enough. Remember that.

"Can you tell me the time?"

"Yes," you say, simply.

Why bother him with details? He probably has a watch.

Certain serious questions are also permanent. I have never found a satisfactory answer to the one beginning "I wonder if there is any hot water for shaving this morning?"

And there is that other one at vespers:

"Are you sure you locked the front door?"

For these, the imagination must be its own reward.

Nothing in life is without imitation. The moon will ape the sun; and even levity can pose for what is in earnest. Some serious questions, then, are actually not serious at bottom.

One of the commonest we recognize at once:

"Is Mrs. Jones at home?"

## ODDLY ENOUGH

"No," says the maid, and we know that she is in on the joke.

And then again, an apparently serious question is often merely rhetorical.

"Have you seen my glasses round anywhere?" is a good specimen of one of these.

No one has seen your wretched glasses. They are probably under the bed. Have you looked there yet? Why don't you wear them on a ribbon?

But the worst of all is the oldest:

"Feels a bit like spring, doesn't it?"

God will provide the unfortunate with an answer.



## A Notebook

A NOTEBOOK is a handy thing to have if you are fond of writing. It is a far better outlet for one's talents than ordinary humdrum letters. It has all the privacy of a diary and none of the routine. I recommend one, size 3 x 6, limp leather. Look on it as a companion and the recording angel of inspiration. Its homely presence in the pocket or by the bed will never trip you into logging the failures of a stupid life. Scribble in it with pen, with pencil; or even with a pin, if a better stylus is wanting. Misspell to your very heart's content. Flirt with good English grammar; leave your "i's" undotted; level your "m's" and "n's." Write badly and uphill. Blot, smear, and erase. Do all these things to excess, if you will, for the value of a notebook lies in its illegibility: the most famous notebooks are the most illegible.

I shall not cite examples, but there is Shelley who wrote:

ODDLY ENOUGH

Na na na na na na  
Na na na na na na, etc.,

in his notebook, which, translated, is nothing less than his lovely lament beginning:

Oh, world! oh, life! oh, time!  
On whose last steps I climb. . . .

To be sure, I have done much better than that. I have not written better poetry, but I have employed stenographic notes more exciting than a deliberate series of *na-na's*. There are several things in my notebook which I defy anyone to translate, for ill or fame. One of my best sonnets, you must know, has only the first four lines. After them there is a blank space, and if that won't be pretty difficult for my biographer to figure, I don't know what will. In case you are piqued, shall I tell you that the sonnet was to be called "Sonnet After Reading the Sonnet Number of *Sonnets*"? It begins:

Come, for an hour I've stumbled through this stuff,  
And gargled somewhat of cold Hippocrene,  
Or marked how young Hyperion shot the green,  
And where Prometheus played into the rough.

But I have never been able to carry it to the fourteenth decimal.

## A NOTEBOOK

On a neighboring page I can barely disentangle some hieroglyphics that pertain, apparently, to the opening lines of a play. I can see that the characters are historical: Wellington is one of them, and the Duc de Javaisdit, the other. I hope they both died happy. The opening is spirited:

WELLINGTON (*facing him*): Well, I s—w—  
a—g—t—g—h—!

DUC DE JAVASDIT: No, no. N—t—, S—,  
n—t—.

WELLINGTON (*evasively*): P—n—. B—y—  
n—c—t—, d—i—!

At this point the signals fade, and I can just make out a note which says:

*Golf tomorrow at 5 with JNW and CRB.*

That is the only historical play I have ever written.

It is a good plan, I have discovered, to sprinkle a lot of Latin and other learning through your notebook. Also a little Greek, if you have it. I have no Greek. (Stevenson said: "I am sorry indeed that I have no Greek, but I should be sorrier still if I were dead.") *οἱ πολλοὶ* is the only Greek expression except *καὶ* that I know, and I see, on turning over the pages that it appears in my notebook

eleven times. But I have lots of Latin. Arthur Machen has lots of Latin. He speaks of it in "The London Adventure." But Machen's Latin is obtrusive; mine is practical. *Vide supra*, I write; and *ibid*, and *volens nolens*, and *hic et ubique*, and *Senex quoque tuus est*.

I am sorry to admit that there is a great deal of idle verse in my notebook. I see only one good thing, and that is not mine. It is the last stanza of Francis Ledwidge's "Had I a Golden Pound," blooming there like a frail wilderness flower:

And with the silver change we'd prove  
The truth of love to life's own end,  
With hearts the years could but embolden,  
Had I a golden pound to spend.

Beneath it I see also

*Pay A. the \$3.64 you owe him.*

But most of the verse is mine: much of it is unfinished. Some of it I shall never finish. Some of it I shall. I think I shall finish one of them now. I wrote, one day,

A rose-bug in the morning  
Is the gardener's warning.  
night

I see that I must have had my *Sprichwort*



## A N O T E B O O K

fast in mind, else surely we shouldn't be finding *night* as the crown of the third line. Obviously I meant the parody to be complete. The third line, then, is easy:

A rose-bug at night

Why not? I have never seen one, but *there must be rose-bugs at night*. On this assumption our theme is brought to a delicate close:

A rose-bug in the morning  
Is the gardener's warning.  
A rose-bug at night  
Is out of sight.

But the climax in my notebook is represented in the following verses which, if I have transcribed them accurately, comprise a thought that is nearly complete. Even so, you will probably be disappointed because I terminated, abruptly, what might have proved an absorbing interview, and like the good housewife with her lively besom, swept abstraction out the door.

ODDLY ENOUGH

THE TRANSCENDENTAL  
DENTIST

The transcendental dentist in his quiet native  
heath  
Is a shy and tender creature who is fond of pulling  
teeth;  
Not the vigorous bicuspid nor the molar of the  
jaw,  
The incisor and the canine and the wisdom ones  
and a'  
(Which are commonly the victims of the hammer  
and the saw),

But the rarer, subtler denticle of problems of the  
brain —  
The eye-tooth of an argument; perhaps now and  
again  
One tenacious root of dogma, which affords  
exquisite pleasure  
To a transcendental dentist who extracts it with  
a measure  
Of indifference, intending to regard it at his  
leisure.

I have found it most confusing when a man of his  
profession  
(Rising dimly from the middle of eclectic pre-  
possession)  
Tries to simulate the manner of the simple dental  
kind,  
Who analyze their clients with a quarryworker's  
mind,  
Peering darkly down an orifice to see what they  
can find.

## A N O T E B O O K

Very frequently it happens that in searching for a  
cavity  
The transcendental dentist, in a fit of such depravity,  
May linger for a moment on the edge of an abstraction,  
Picking absently about him on the general field of action  
(In a manner not entirely to the patient's satisfaction).

Very frequently, moreover, in his intellectual ardor  
He may follow with a flourish that will dig a little harder,  
Giving one an opportunity astutely to observe  
What a fiery bit of passion is a solitary nerve  
(And how a pain shoots upward on a hysteresis curve).

I suggest, in explanation, that the transcendental feeling  
Is presumably ballooning in the void above the ceiling  
When the palpitating sufferer is uncomfortably aware  
Of the horrid limitation of a dentist's easy chair  
(And the uselessness coincident with offering a prayer).

Let us leave the transcendental in his quiet habitat  
Where the tooth is but a figment and reality not that;  
Let us leave him to his theories and his reasoning,  
*per se,*

ODDLY ENOUGH

And the foggy inclinations that beset his little  
day —

And depart him while there's still a chance for us  
to get away.

Also, I suggest that you don't put your  
name on your notebook. People are sent to  
asylums, nowadays, on pretty thin evidence.



## An Adventure in Curiosity

**D**ID you ever realize that according to American cartoonists the great English word for the Chinese is "Fliday?" Of course you didn't. But it is so: All Chinamen in cartoons are laundry-men, and all of them are either blowing water on shirts or else receiving shabby bundles from seedy customers, and saying with great poise and equanimity: "*Fliday.*"

When this first occurred to me I pondered it a long time. And the more I pondered the more I wanted to investigate for myself. The thing grew on me. My naturally inquisitive nature was aroused. I thirsted for the musical note of "Fliday;" I developed a passion to hear that one word spoken as only a Chinaman could speak it. I ate some chop suey, and even considered buying a Mandarin jacket. . . .

For many years we have had an excellent

laundress. She never steals my cuff links nor rips off responsible buttons. I admire her, and so it was with considerable misgiving that I sneaked out of the house one morning with a small parcel of nether garments in search of a bath.

I entered a very respectable Chinese laundry, and said, in my most celestial manner:

“When can I have these back?”

There was a breathless interval.

“Satulday.”

This was a severe blow, I thought; but then, we live in a world of disappointments.

Another day, another bundle.

“When can I have these?”

“Wenday.”

I banged the door as I went out, and I could hear the little bell attached to it jangle in an irritating way. Subsequent tries were no better. Not a Chinaman said “Fliday.” I came early; I came late. Once I leaned over the counter in a confidential manner and talked to the spokesman while he fingered a lightning calculator.

“Look here.” I said this tactfully, leading up to my point. “Thursday bad day for me come for shirts” (I had considered saying

AN ADVENTURE IN CURIOSITY

“shirtee,” but I did not). “How about later in week?”

“All light. Next day.”

I fled.

One morning something happened. I found a sign, and it said: “Wah Lee, 24 Hour Laundry.” I had now been smuggling shirts for several weeks.

Punct at noon on Thursday I was there.

“When can I have?”

“Tomollow.”

Men have died for less.



## St. George Indeed

IN the beginning it was all very simple. I was to go to the public library and procure whatever information I could about St. George and the Dragon — either or both, but preferably both. Because one speaks of them habitually in a breath (as a sort of twin entity, that is) it was considered enough that I look up St. George. They said it was a sure bet that the Dragon, faithful beast, would be on an adjoining page. As a matter of fact, it was Lucy who said this, and Lucy is, by her divine love of animals and human nature, blind to the infamous ways of literature. I have repeatedly found that if one wants to look up a Pair, like Paul and Virginia, or Zemin and Gulindy, or Theseus and the Minotaur, or Van and Schenck, you have to go about it separately. You find out all about Paul, and then try to round up Gulindy. Or by the time you have investigated the horrid life of Theseus, Mr. Schenck is engaged at Keith's in singing an



entirely new dialect song. But I could not convince them. They said, even, that if I would just locate the Dragon somewhere, breathing heavily, undoubtedly George could be found nearby, feeding his horse, say, or calling for a new Excalibur.

The main thing was that the Sunday School class should give a play, which was not yet written (a mere incident in the history of Sunday School plays), in which Henry was to be St. George, and the Ridley twins, and Otis Manners, and Peter Waitt, and perhaps two or three others if it turned out to be a hot day, were to impersonate the Dragon. Of course Peter would be the head. He would carry a blow torch and a fire extinguisher and roll gigantic eyes by means of string and elastics. The Ridley twins rather expected to be the *caudal vertebræ* (but of course they didn't call it that) or, better, the wagging part of the tail. They are both only eight, being twins, which is really a pretty young age at which to be the tail of a dragon, especially when you can't see where you are going. But Lucy thought it would be all right. The important thing was that there would be absolutely no chance of getting wounded. A dragon is commonly

wounded in the head.\* A wound in any other part of his anatomy is of no use whatsoever, and might as well be called off and done over. Henry (the head) would undoubtedly get a good clout on the ear (the Dragon's ear, you know) and then he would certainly uncork the fire extinguisher as he did in the spare room upstairs one day last summer, and — well, for all purposes the end of the play would be virtually in sight.

But, as I said, in the beginning it was all very simple. I had only to procure the information, and the annual riot, which some still insist on calling the Sunday School play, would be assured. I resolved to do my best. Bright and early one Monday in the late afternoon, which left everybody until the following Saturday in which to write the play and get it rehearsed, I took my umbrella and went to the public library. Our public library is really very large, for I live in a very large city. In fact, I have been told it is the very largest library in the city. I have looked into it gingerly a few times and smelt the reading room. Literature has a distinct odor, it seems, which is most fully realized in a public library on a wet or

\**Vide* "Handbuch der Drachenkultur." H. H. Schmelzenschön.

ST. GEORGE INDEED

sluggish day. This was a wet and rather a sluggish day.

So I hurried through the reading room to the delivery desk. I don't see why they call it the delivery desk, for I have never seen anything delivered there except a few very minor and unimportant speeches, such as "I'm sorry, we haven't that book, Madam"; "Do you know who is the author, Sir?"; or "I'm afraid we couldn't locate it just by the color of the binding. If you could think of the title or the name of the person who wrote it, or what it was about, we might be able to help you . . ." Trifles like that, but nothing of any depth and dimension, such as talks on "St. George under Cover," "Representative Georges and Dragons," or "George," simply. During the following hour I made note of a speech that would have thrilled the building, but I did not deliver it.

I went about my errand. A small conversation ensued.

I: Good afternoon.

ATTENDANT: Good afternoon.

I: A rather wet day outside.

ATTENDANT (*looking at my umbrella*): Very wet. There's a check room downstairs.

I (*plunging*): I want to find out something about Saint George.

ATTENDANT: Saint Who?

I: Saint George. He was one of the Saints, you know.

ATTENDANT: O, you mean in the Bible?

I: No, not exactly. I think he was an independent Saint.

ATTENDANT: And you want to find out what about him?

I (*cornered*): I just want to find out about him. What his — er — habits were, his — er — recreations, if any, and (*inspired*) who were his intimate friends.

ATTENDANT: I see. (*To fellow attendant*) Alice, this gentleman wants to find out something about Saint, Saint. . . .

I: George. Saint George. He was one of the Dragons.

ATTENDANTS (*in unison*): He was *what*?

I (*desperately*): He's in a book. A volume. Don't you understand? I want to find out something . . .

And so I was led to the card catalogue.

Have you ever seen a card catalogue in a modern library? I am told they do not exist on the Continent. I don't wonder. I should

rather run my thumb across a million backs than rustle about in a drawerful of pasteboards. The card catalogue of our library is in a room by itself, and it consists, roughly, of a dozen cabinets. The room is as nearly sound-proof as possible, which was a cunning move on the part of the architects, only there was really no need for it. There are always more women in the room than men. One must do one's swearing outside. I began immediately. Not to swear, of course, but to hunt for the right cabinet. I found a nice looking one, about fifteen feet high and half as broad, that seemed to be passionately devoted to "S's." There was "S" something to "S" something else on every drawer. Cleverly, I picked the one marked "Sab to Sbug" in which (in my innocence) I fancied I would trap my quarry. Somewhere between the works of Mr. Sab and Professor Sbug I should find Saint George. I found *Saint* in large type at the top of the card. Underneath it said: "See St." I had been outwitted.

So I turned to a drawer which I could just reach on tiptoe, marked "Squab to Stt." The latter a book on stammering, I supposed. I fumbled about in it. There were no end of

Saints. I had no idea that the world was so pious. There was St. Andrews and several books on golf, St. Bartholomew and St. Catherine, and St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Paul and the breweries, but no St. George. Not a one.

I muttered a low imprecation and bowed my head in thought. Then I looked up *dragon*, obviously the correct thing to do. There was a Charles Dragon and J. T. Dragon, Jr., but they sounded childishly harmless. I was certain that my George would never have tilted a dragon who called himself Charles. Even Sir Eglamore, who once had some rather amusing dealings with one, did not pick, I felt reasonably sure, a creature who signed his name J. T., Jr. So I became desperate, and looked up with abandon *and* and *the*, and lastly *George*. None. . . . Nothing.

I had done with Georges forever. If Lucy would persist in a Sunday School play she could jolly well use the paragraph in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*:

The connexion of St. George with a dragon, familiar since the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, can be traced to the close of the sixth century. [As if anyone wanted to.] At Arsuf or Joppa — neither of them far from Lydda — Per-

## ST. GEORGE INDEED

seus had slain the sea-monster that threatened the virgin Andromeda, and George, like many another Christian saint, entered into the inheritance of veneration previously enjoyed by a pagan hero.

O, hum.

Henry and the Ridley twins would adore that. It sounded romantic and full of ideas. The phrase about the "inheritance of veneration" alone ought to inspire any dragon's head to some marvelous pyrotechny.

And Arsuf or Joppa! Poor George! Any saint who had ever had his fair name linked with such villainous-sounding places may surely be excused for not wishing to appear in the simple card catalogue of our public library. No just hagiologist would want to see him there. Certainly not.

I was preparing my umbrella to take me out in the rain when the attendant with whom I had already spoken came running up. She rushed to the point.

ATTENDANT: Are you Mr. (my real name)?

I: I'm afraid I am.

ATTENDANT: I'm awfully sorry.

I (*with dignity*): You needn't be. It's a good name.

ATTENDANT: No. Not that.

I (*curiously*): Well, what then?

ATTENDANT: Somebody — a lady, I think — came in this morning and picked out a dozen books.

I: How thoughtful of her.

ATTENDANT: That's not all.

I: No. Of course not.

ATTENDANT: She said you would take them, when you called, to the Trinity Parish House.

I (*with conviction*): Yes, it was a lady.

ATTENDANT: I didn't know about it before or I would have told you when you came in.

I: That's quite all right. Things like this are never known until faith is destroyed or a character undermined.

ATTENDANT: O, dear. I do hope . . .

I (*with resignation*): Never mind. It shan't get into the papers.

ATTENDANT: She said, "Just give him these. He'll know."

I (*in a whisper*): Saint George?

ATTENDANT (*handing me a double armful*): Saint George.

I (*in solemn exit*): And the Dragon?

ATTENDANT (*very softly now*): I think so.

On the way out I got the doorman to open my umbrella.





## Variations

IN our apartment house we are all passionately fond of music. To begin with, the janitor, dear fellow, is wedded to his art. He has a small, palsied piano concealed in his basement cloister, and on this he plays hour after hour, without so much as a thought or a minute's rest for his tired hands (or a look at the cold, dead furnace). He plays good music and bad with equal inspiration, and although the remote situation of his modest *atelier* rather muffles and spoils the notes, there are other ways by which we mere tyros and dabblers in the great art understand, nay appreciate, what he is about. If the snow still lies unshoveled on the sidewalk or the garbage pails are not rid of their burden for the morning, then we know for a certainty that he has been romancing with popular pieces, sea-ballads, and the lighter things of Chopin. But if, on the other hand (so often the case), there is no hot water to be had and the first exqui-

site ice crystals begin to bead the radiator, then we all assume, and rightly, that he has plunged again into his sonatas and symphonies. Happy, happy man! Happy in his swift genius like the throstle on the bursting twigs of May.

Naturally, there are one or two dissenters. A few rough words have circulated about the building to the effect that Mr. Convolvulus is by first impulse a musician who, because of complete indifference to the sordid in life, foolishly permitted himself to be confounded with a *real* janitor in Hadden's Employment Bureau. By a mere blunder of fate, then, he occupies his present position. And what possible harm in that? It does not weigh upon him. It does not restrict him in the least. His day remains a day of arpeggios, tonics, and consecutive fifths, and almost all of us could ask nothing better. (I suppose we might *ask* it, but we wouldn't get it.) And the landlords are happy, too. Mr. Convolvulus is thrifty. He saves no end of coal.

But, after all, he is a mere incident in our wide range of talent. There is a young tenor in the building who lives on the floor just below me. Some friends of mine once care-

## VARIATIONS

lessly named a place even lower where he could go if he cared to. He is still with us, however. He looks just a bit like John McCormack. Just a little bit. Not very much. Probably some one has told him so. He sings delightfully. To-day it is summer in New England, and though the air is alive with all manner of sound and music, his fresh, sweet voice rises like a beaming escalator to my casement. Three notes in particular I love. I have grown to love them. One does grow to love such things.\* They are all three, I believe, components of a diatonic scale, yet the highest, on days of excessive humidity, has about it something, *je ne sais quoi* (in print), of the exotic. They are all, too, of a descending order. Like a toboggan slide, only faster and not so well iced. "If one hears bad music," said Oscar Wilde, "it is one's duty to drown it in conversation." But try, my friend, to drown in conversation these mad, Erewhonian notes billowing up through the apartment court. They are undrownable.

I am informed that this young tenor is going in for grand opera. Voice, doublet, and buskin. We shall miss him. We shall miss him

\* It is sometimes called, in the psychology books, the Final Stage.

at 7 A.M. or 10.30 P.M. on Sundays, especially. And the small boys who, at their games, used to catch up his glad and towering refrain on a spring morning and return it with interest, they likewise, will miss him. For a block or so, in any direction, people will miss him. I must find out what company is taking him on. I am very partial to grand opera, and I should hate to have him miscast. But I suppose the public can be trusted.

My rooms look out on a little court. There is a pale garden at the bottom of it and a square slice of sky above. It is very little and intimate. About five o'clock every afternoon it becomes indescribably intimate, for that is the hour when Miss Perfectly sits at her window across the way and practises on the 'cello. I have often estimated the distance between her window and mine and fugitively wondered if I could heave a sixteen-pound shot that far. I think I could. But it is a pointless idea, for she really plies her bow so well and the exercises are so quaintly disarming that I can take no positive action. She has one fragment in particular that I am certain was written for the double bass. When the opportunity offers, I shall ask her. She will laugh.

## VARIATIONS

With luck, she might even stop playing it.

The other members of our circle who perform are still numerous if less important. A student in an adjoining apartment develops, in his brisker and cavalier moments, into a downright demon on an upright piano. Just overhead several young ladies of promising age and pleasing mien have informed me continually that they are confirmed ukuleleists. The ukulele, as is well known in the records of the criminal court, provides, for a ridiculous sum, the most impromptu of all instruments. It is played entirely by ear, though for the best syncopation the hands may be used. Easily portable, it is gathered to the heart and troubled at all hours. Thus it becomes violently suitable to informal apartment life, and suggests itself immediately to accompany a catch between courses or to drown out the insistent creditor knocking smartly on the door. My talented friends above all play it to varying degrees. In this simple way they have made themselves popular and sought after. But unfortunately, as yet, not by the police.

When I moved in last autumn and faced it all squarely and enthusiastically for the

first time, I was indeed delighted. I discovered (what I had never realized before) that music is the great narcotic to the jaded spirit and a stimulus to writing. And my day, from tenor to 'cellist, is now one crescent flood of joy. In less than a week I perceived further that the world is as nothing without music. Here in my grasp was a wealth of miscible material. I formulated a little plan. I prepared a small paragraph which I posted downstairs next to the mail boxes. It read:

## NOTICE

We need bigger, better, and (if possible) louder music in this building. Any one playing the calliope, lotus-pipe, or Tasmanian tom-tom should apply at once to Mr. Convolvulus, janitor and Professor of Harmony. If he is not at the piano, try the furnace (and tell him, as he loves Beauty, to put on some more coal). Satisfactory compensation. *Urgent.*

Such, I thought, would show that someone, at least, desired to organize on a permanent basis. I posted it at five, prompt, one afternoon, just when I knew Miss Perfectly was applying the resin. I went out. At six I returned. Miss Perfectly was still rounding up the accidentals. The tenor, in brittle tones, was finding his place. There were other sounds. But the notice had disappeared.

Artists are very difficult to approach.



## How Tommy Catenary Lost His Sinaw

*(A Bedtime Story by a Mathematician)*

THERE was a great bustle in the big woods that night when little Jimmy Polygon peered out of the fourth dimension just as old Gibbous, the Moon, lit his pale lantern. For a long time Tommy Catenary had lain quiet in the hollow tree listening to Aunt Hypotenuse and Uncle Binomial chewing a lot of square roots. He remembered the words of Daddy Triangle (who had had an attack of analytical analysis and couldn't walk): "Don't let me catch you playing with those common divisors again; for if I do I'll lay you across my parabola and paddle you well!" Not that Tommy Catenary was afraid. O no! But he recollected how Jimmy Polygon had threatened to take his sinaw away from him. And he loved his little sinaw.

Suddenly Aunt Hypotenuse looked down at him. "Shake a leg there, Tommy Caten-

ary," she cried, "and run over to the fourth dimension and borrow Miss Corollary's altitude." Tommy Catenary didn't want to go, but just then Uncle Binomial bit off such a big piece of cube root, and glowered so fiercely at Tommy that he scampered off clippity-clippity for Miss Corollary's. Now when poor little Tommy rounded the corner of the fourth dimension where old Gibbous, the Moon, was smiling down, out jumped bad Jimmy Polygon. And Tommy Catenary was *so* scared that he dropped his *sin $\alpha$*  which he had clutched tightly in his paw, and what do you think? Jimmy Polygon pounced right on it. Yes, siree, right on it.

(Tomorrow I shall tell you all how Willie Calculus found the Cider and drank an unknown quantity.)





## In Praise of Pops

**R**OBBED of their name, would they ever sound as sweet? The tinkle of hard ice in soft glasses, the gentle reverberation of heel and sole plying about industriously in the dangerous labyrinth of tables, the steady drone of the modulated voice, and the snap of iron pretzels; could we crowd it all into any other configuration of letters at once so comfortably satisfying and fresh as "Pops?" Or the music, even, that wells up between two conversations and sways for a moment, imperious, at the head of the hall while the chatters and the laughers and the gushers subside into an approximate silence and pursue, we may suppose, each to his own taste, the separate fancy awakened by the composition. What a width of ease and plunder of frivolity are bottled in the Pops! The stretch of weary legs, the release of the elbows, a minimum of decorum for a maximum of comfort, "everything," indeed, "but sleep." Sleep! Who calls

there? Who so laggard as to win it in this pleasant quarter, or succumb under the very nose of Pan to that negative condition for which a dull play is the proper opiate?

It is nearly eight and the floor is filling. Back, far back, from the autocratic position in which we find ourselves, a low rail marks off the division of space and collection of tables occupied by those lucky ones who have entered the hall at "admission" price, and who, because they are early, punctual souls, have come in their own right into the possession of the same amount of furniture for which we have been charged a modest, but additional, sum. There they sit, like brave excursionists outward bound, their duffle stowed below, hearts on their sleeve, and the smile of farewell on their faces. See! They cannot all crowd to the taffrail, and some are lost irrevocably behind it, a blur of color and animation. But the first are pressing forward, and the occupants of a box at the opera could be no happier than they.

It is nearly eight, but much too early for food. The associations of Pops are shamefully entwined with the thought of condiments. The very fact that pantry and ice-box are, in a

limited measure, continually open to us should turn us forthwith against them. But no. The round dinner from which we have scarce risen has all but faded from memory. A great wave of hunger sweeps over us, and a thirst unquenchable settles upon our parched and rattling palates. It is much too early for food, yet at least we can order. *Embarras de choix!* What shall it be? Simplicity, the familiar and lethal qualities of lemonade and ginger ale? Or the fellowship of Pop punch, streaming from a pitcher like some deep-dyed nectar into separate glasses? Convention cautions safety. Curiosity smacks its lips and prods the eye to stray again over that portion of the list entitled "What's in a Name," and such curious compounds, Hi-Brow, Mar-vo and Theo Nett. Drinks all, drinks for the gods, sealed in wicked jorums with gorgeous labels, and charged with a power of bubbles that wink, not alone on the brim, but steadily in the luminous depths as well. We pledge ourselves to the spirit of democracy and record, in a minikin hand upon the waitress's check, our modest vote in favor of a pint of ——. And something to eat, something to chew on. Something to assuage these pangs of hunger

which a cigarette can at best but postpone. Sandwiches . . . cake . . . pretzels. Ah, pretzels! Fortunate, delicious food. Spidery crustaceans, browned and polished to a turn like the misshapen designs in a cane-bottom chair. Fibrous and strong, rigid and bristling; knobbed with white lumps of salt baked firmly into the surface; white lumps of salt, curious culinary parasites, barnacles from the bottomless oven. Plenty of pretzels. Plenty . . . But she is gone, our waitress, to avoid the first rush in the kitchen. She left us a smile; not her best, perhaps, for it is still early, but it will do. We shall keep it as a hostage until she has threatened and squeezed her way back to our table and deposited thereon the things we have ordered. Then we shall return it.

A number has gone up. A large black "1" on a white card. We find it in the program and discover it is Berlioz, "The Hungarian March." A spirited beginning, but there will be depressions. The conductor has appeared, bowed, and poised his baton. The smoke, already suffused in the pleasant air, rises afresh in a hundred blue spirals. Off in a corner somewhere that thin yet distinct rattle of

spoons continues unabated. Now a lull in conversation runs across the hall, as a wave of silence sweeps over the frogs in a summer pool. The baton descends; we are content to dream and let our small philosophies and idle fancy scatter back and forth upon the face of the music.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Kinda good, Mamie, huh?"

"Yeah, kinda."

"But I like 'em softer. Sorta dreemy."

"Yeah, sorta."

"Remember when we was t' th' Grommet an' Halyard Workers' ball last Crismus, how they played that tune? Wha' was it? — 'How d'y' like it Lonesome?'"

"Yeah. An' th' fella that played on the banjer. Gosh, he could play th' banjer. Remember him? He ain't here, I guess. I don't see no banjers, ennyway. Y'd think they'd have one. Why, gosh, even th' Grommet Five has got one. An' I don't see no saxes, neither. Lookit all them fellas; an' none of 'em's got a sax. Gee whiz, what an' orcheater!"

"What they playin', Ruthie?"

"I dunno. Gee whiz! These names 'd kill a pig. It's seven, ain't it? Well, seven's — gee,

lookit yourself! (Spells it.) 'Dubinushka, arranged by Jacchia'."

"Huh. That's th' fella up there with th' stick. Y' wouldn't think he could do that."

"No."

"Sounds kinda funny-like. Not enough blues in it."

"That's a cute hat y' got, T'resa."

"Yeah."

"Kinda cute. Think so, Ruthie?"

"Yeah, kinda."

"What they playin' now?"

"I dunno. Can't read it ennyway, so I don't see what diff'rence it makes. Some Polak wrote it, I guess. Sounds like it, mebbe."

"See that fella over there with th' curly hair? These are swell macaroons. Yeah, kinda blond. Looks somp'n like a fella I saw in th' pitchers. Not much, but somp'n."

"Gosh, Mame, I only got one straw. I can't never get all this lemonade out with one straw. What's she think I am, ennyway?"

"They goin' t' play somp'n again?"

"Yeah. Guess so."

"Lookit, T'resa, they got th' red lights on over th' orchester's head: Grommet and Hal-yard Workers. Gosh!"

IN PRAISE OF POPS

"Gosh!"

"We gotta sing th' factory hymn what Gus Gleebees wrote. Know all th' words, Ruthie?"

"Yeah."

"What's that part about

We are sweeping like a comet,  
With a halyard and a grommet. . . .?"

"I've forgot."

"Don't you sing, Mame. Somebody might hear you."

"Fat chance. They'd be lookin' at you t' see mebbe what'd be comin' out uv such a big mouth! (They sing.)

\* \* \* \* \*

And so the Pops have become an institution. An incorrigible institution. Night after night in the long first months of summer, the tables in Symphony Hall harbor a strange assortment of transients and devotees. The well-dressed man, quite abloom in his niche of candid indifference; the weary soul, lolling luxuriously in his chair, reaching for a bit of the gold lost in a weary day; the "professional" music-lover, feeding deliriously upon an unconditional mass of phrase and measure. Chaffers and banterers, happy here as any-

where, conjuring up sly and nimbused matter about people and music and food and clothes. Ruminants all, chewing upon stray, loose thread-ends of thought. Romanticists all, climbing their ivory towers and coasting with some Novalis after the shadowy blue flower of an evening.

The aria of an opera long lain fallow in the mind. The leader will play it. Cloak it yourself. Stretch it out as tenor or baritone rolled it across the pit. "Ave Maria"; the "Largo." Ah, what depths. What poppy and mandragora! Liadov's "The Music Box." Ah, what elfin humor. What a thridding of the *sympathique*! Pops. Ah, Pops! A garden. A delightful garden. Without the beer.





## I Never Go to Europe

I NEVER go to Europe; I am always seeing people off on the steamer. Sometimes I think that when it's not buying wedding presents my chief occupation in life is wandering down to the North River docks to wave a handkerchief at people bound for England or Africa or some other of those remote spots which have long lived for me only in the Arcadia of the mind. Coleridge once said that teachers are always seeing their pupils across the gang-plank but that they never make the voyage. My state is similar and sad; for with the first crocus of spring begins a bustle and stir in my neighbors' houses and away they fly for castles in Spain. And away am I for the smell of wharves and the sound of harbor whistles.

I know steamers from stem to stern. I have ridden in their elevators, lounged in the lounging rooms, conversed flippantly with cabin boy and purser alike, poked my head

into my friend's cabin, rapped my knuckles smartly on the gleaming rail, glanced casually at the picture of the fat man getting into his last year's life-preserver, appraised with epicurean eye the luxurious depth of the dining saloon, and murmured audibly: "Well, well, this is a fine boat for a voyage."

But I always get off when the whistle blows.

"Good-bye," I say, and kiss the wrong person. "Good-bye, and my best to London!" — or wherever it is that the one I should have kissed is going.

The boat vanishes and I am left alone.

Vividly I remember the time when *I* had a passage for Europe. Perhaps it was a Cook's tour; I have forgotten that, but at any rate I was on the very verge of sailing when of a sudden, out of the warm splendor of the day, I received a message: the ——s were going on my steamer.

"What!" I cried. "The ——s! How delightful! How immense!"

Sailing day arrived. I went to the pier and across the gang-plank amid a crowd of vociferous passengers.

"The ——s! There they are! How jolly! Yoo Hoo!"

## I NEVER GO TO EUROPE

Around the ship; such a fine ship. A blast from the whistle, and in the ultimate confusion I found myself calling out good-byes. Before I knew it I was down on the wharf and the ship had gone.

Well, well, I shall *never* get to Europe!



## About Umbrellas

A RAINY day is all right in its place, which is outside — by itself. If I can sit all morning in comfort by the fire and watch the lazy drops pursue each other patiently down the glass, and hear the soft drumming on the shingles overhead, and the low gurgle from the northeast corner of the house where the gutter is leaking again (we must get that fixed), it is a pleasure to have it rain. In fact, it is always a pleasure to watch nature operate if her operations are adjusted to dry feet and an even temper. Rain away! I have a book this morning and nothing particular to do but read, and in two or three pages I think Mr. Fletcher will drop me a hint that may solve the whole mystery nicely. Unless, of course, the man didn't really die. Ever since Sherlock Holmes returned I have doubted the veracity of detective-story death. It is annoyingly unstable.

But yesterday it was raining and I had

## ABOUT UMBRELLAS

to go out. I wore my rubbers, I recall, and carried the best umbrella I could find. I never can find *the* best one. Somebody else has always taken it. As a matter of truth, I have never seen it around the house in all these years. I have only heard of it. The best one is a legend, a symbol, a mere mythical lance of anti-pluvial perfection. On dry days in summer I have tried to surprise it in the umbrella stand, but it is never there. Nothing but canes and a few tattered and dusty shrouds clinging to the lean ribs that bare them piteously to the elements. Summer goes, and yet, with the first big flood in the fall, I hear again provoking rumors of it and I am advised to take the old crook-handled one that leaks and leave the best one (says a voice). "I may want it." You can have it.

So I went out yesterday and bore aloft a black baldachin that had seen better but not wetter days. The catch on it, I discovered, would keep it down and not up. Now, if a difference in mechanical action is at all necessary, I can see one advantage of the arrangement: An umbrella is closed more than it is open. But the umbrella architects (have they ever been really rained on?) seem to forget,

many of them, that the man on the street, if he likes his umbrella, likes it open. And he doesn't like to climb up into the rigging and press continually a cold and probably wet thumb against a bit of brass to keep it spread and himself half-way dry. Mine kept closing abruptly and folding me away like the Arabs their tents until a wind of a sudden stole up behind me. A single puff, while I was fingering the catch, put the whole business up forever, so far as I am concerned, and I found myself, like Emily Dickinson's bat:

His small umbrella, quaintly halved,  
Describing in the air  
An arc alike inscrutable,—  
Elate philosopher!

Only, of course, I was not elate.

How the umbrella has changed! It was at first, says the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, anxious to be of service, an "ungainly article which did not hold well together." We moderns must smile at that. It was probably made of stone and bronze and did not "hold up" well either, unless the owner was pretty husky and a member of the king's guard. I am sure, however, that there were no catches to bother with, and that it took a

## ABOUT UMBRELLAS

cyclone to blow it inside out. In more recent centuries, it seems, the umbrella was one of the insignia of royalty and power. I wish it were still, for I never feel less a royalist and less powerful than when I am carrying one. Rather, I am humiliated and ashamed. Nor can I call myself, ever, after the Mahratta princes of India, "lord of the umbrella." It is not in me. The only lords of it I have ever known, indeed, are professors who carry umbrellas about snugly bound and swathed in silk like so many mummied emblems of their innocent profession. Jonas Hanway, who (the *Encyclopædia* tells me) died in 1786, but who up to that point had led a gay life as the first Englishman to carry an umbrella in public, was likely no more jealous of his implement than they. But I expect he was careless, and left it on the London coach or lying about his club, and that one day someone else picked it up and twirled it a bit, and undid the wrappings, and then tried it out, gingerly, on Fleet Street. So there were two of them; and by and by a third. (Unlucky Jonas! Umbrellas, like books, are never returned.) And we are safe in supposing that a few years later the umbrella

## ODDLY ENOUGH

had become quite common, and that people stood them, dripping, in such bathtubs as they had; that the first itinerant rib-menders came threading their way about the residential sections, tinkling their noisy little bells, and that a certain scholar, etymologically inclined, looked into the origin of "umbrella" and found that it came from *ombrella*, Italian dim. of *ombra*, Lat. *umbra* (shade). For apparently (as well as I can make out) the Italians, under those blue, seraphic skies, had a tight time of it distinguishing between rain and shade. Ignorant fellows! Yesterday I could have shown them.





# Sardinia

*(An Air-Tight Phantasy in Two Acts and  
Somewhat in the Elizabethan Manner)*

## ACT I

SCENE: An empty sardine tin reposing in a canning factory. It is in the process of being filled.

*(Enter a sardine.)*

SARD: Alas! The cold, smooth dungeon walls embrace my helpless form, and I am powerless to flee th' accursed spot. (Aside.) But, soft! Someone approaches!

*(Enter second sardine.)*

SECOND SARD (inside): It is, in fact, a tight, snug little room (finding he is not alone) — Ah, good Horatio! (Is that then your name? I think we were both once in the same school.) Ah, good Horatio! To find you here in such a plight! Since first I felt the mesh of net about me, strength has waned. I feel depressed and would that I might couch my weary frame close, close to yours.

ODDLY ENOUGH

HORATIO: Thrice welcome, gentle friend.  
They call you —— ?

SECOND SARD: Brutus. I was — hist! We  
are discovered!

*(Loud noise is heard off stage as packing machinery gets under way. Enter great numbers of sardines, falling prostrate in orderly rows. Groans arise from those underneath, stifled only by a flood of oil entering from up stage. The lid goes on as the curtain falls.)*

ACT II

*Scene:* Same as in Act I. *Time:* Fifteen years later. Noises off stage indicate that a picnic is in progress.

*(Enter a can-opener.)*

CAN-OP: I much regret intruding, gentle sirs, but I am just a tool in others' hands.

VOICE (from top row): Courage, comrades! There is strength in numbers. Our suffering these long years is not in vain. We are such stuff as evil dreams are made on.

BRUTUS (*sotto* from below): Marry, but I'm spoiling for a fight, my good Horatio. Though far too weak to scale these tinny heights, yet am I strong enough to make man quail, and ripe to deal a death-blow to his vitals!

S A R D I N I A

HORATIO (weakly): Your ranting jars and freezes cold my twenty thousand bones.

*(Enter from time to time a thumb and forefinger, exiting, in each instance, with an unfortunate sardine. Finally only Brutus and Horatio remain.)*

BRUTUS: Is't not hard, my friend, that salad days should come to us so late and be withal so brief?

*(Exit Brutus on a leaf of lettuce.)*

HORATIO: Et too, Brute?

*(Exit Horatio on a fork.)*

(The stage grows darker; peals of thunder are heard, and raindrops spatter on the tin. The voices off stage become more subdued. Suddenly a shriek: "I'm poisoned! Oh, I'm poisoned!")

*(Enter ghosts of Brutus and Horatio, attended by a spectral train of Stuffed Olives, Pickles, Sandwiches, and Doughnuts.)*

GHOST OF HORATIO:

Pity, then, the timid, shy sardine, —  
For bread-and-butter halves the go-between.  
Who will deny this helpless, sandwiched  
dummy

The right to monkey with another's tummy?

CURTAIN



## Kitchenettes

I HAVE been at great pains to look up the literature on kitchenettes, and my pains (sharply, across the back) are all that is left me, for I have made the saddening discovery that of the literature on kitchenettes available for the aspiring kitchenetteur there is absolutely none. And so the kitchenette, I must assume, is just another of the essentials of life, like trousers and suspender buttons, in themselves extremely important to the individual, society, and the police, but lacking somehow in the *vrai romantisme* so necessary for adequate public appreciation and interest. Yet I must not belittle my subject; there may be something in it which monographers have missed. Let us squeeze it like a sponge and see.

By the smallest chance, not long ago, I happened into the largest kitchen I have ever seen. What had certainly been at one time two or three rooms, or perhaps the com-

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plete ground plan of the left wing, was now a single culinary chamber of devastating proportions. . . . Sometimes, when your eyes are very tired, if you close them you will experience a strange sensation of looking into a bottomless pit. Into a terrible, frightful infinity. (I hope you are never that tired.) And so, on that particular evening, as I was accompanying my host (I think it was my host) to the ice-box and the ginger ale loft, I came suddenly to the threshold. The enormity of the moment is still upon me. Before me swept an acre of sheer; or, haply, some of it was unswept. Miles away, at the southern end, a tiny stove, no more than the merest speck. Somewhere in the west a sink, and far and to the north what would upon inspection have surely proved to be a kitchen table. Across those waste spaces, cooks and slaveys must have moved at their priestlike tasks, perhaps for days not within hailing distance. I speak of it in a hushed voice. My host (it was my host) said they were quite used to it. But I could imagine whole dinners being lost in transit from the oven to the pantry, or crashing to the floor when the second maid tripped on her roller skates. Luckily, in these

days, such a kitchen is the exception rather than the rule.

It has been sagely remarked that the ancient solidity of the New England household was founded upon the fact that the kitchen remained the center of the home. There onions were peeled, doughnuts designed, the spinet exercised; there the Reverend Edwards was received and reputations refuted; and there (had it existed) the *Atlantic* would have been read. In such surroundings, you may be sure, appeared the first Cape Cod fire-lighter; and shortly thereafter civilization began.

And now the kitchenette. We must have either the largest or smallest of everything. The largest automobile, the largest income, the largest circulation, the largest theater, the largest university, the largest Guernsey bull. But the smallest kitchenette. I am positive that the man who invented the kitchenette was born and brought up on a submarine. The K-something, quite likely. He recognized the sweetness of efficiency. He made ten kitchens grow where but one grew before, and Jonathan Swift would have loved him. In the year 1926 the stove still stands

## KITCHENETTES

in the kitchenette. It is only a matter of time, however, until the kitchenette will go into the stove.

Let me divide mankind roughly into its two components. Let me speak as follows, even though in the speaking I offend some sensitive heart. The world (let me say) is divided into two classes: those who cook with the kitchenette door open and those who do not. The officers and executive committee of the second class live in our apartment house, but I am informed on very good authority (the public mortuary records) that a certain number of them make the supreme sacrifice every year. A horrible death, don't you think? It is in such connection that the succulent phrase "smothered in onions" originated.

The kitchenette itself is undoubtedly the pride of its architect and landlord. Yet it seems, when the apartment is new and no rich garden produce has ever boiled ferociously in its secret recesses, an escapable quantity. You trickle through unpainted rooms piled high with fixtures and radiators unattached, and warm with the flavor of fresh shavings. After you have seen the sleeping porch (what dreams!) and the view

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of Otto's garage from the front room, and heard that the water will be running by October 5, and have mentally hung all the pictures three times and decided that the piano can stand just as well over there as here in the corner, you will remember the kitchenette. You had forgotten all about it.

But here at last my subject fails me. There is everything about a kitchenette but the genuine capacity to produce a meal, so why discuss it further? I have seen the makings of a meal go into it many times but I have never yet seen the finished item emerge. The projects undertaken there are far too vast. Expecting a kitchenette to compound a dinner is like expecting to hatch an eagle from a hummingbird's egg. It can't be done. The kitchenette is simply too far in advance of our age. Shun it. Let it alone. It is intended to go with an era in which people (fortunately, reader, not you and I) shall live on capsules and predigested pills. From the present state of my stomach I fear I shall not live to see it. . . . You will excuse me a moment? I think I smell something burning.





## On Moving

*"What a dislocation of comfort is comprised in that word moving!"*

— *Lamb, letter to Thos. Mannering.*

THE desire to move is one of our strongest characteristics. "Well, I'm off," says the American. And he often is. In the spring we move to the country; in the fall we move to the city. Or, quite as true, we move to other places which lie expensively somewhere in between. Or, more likely still, we merely move. For it is not (it is never) essential that one must have a goal before one acts. Many families have moved successfully because at the moment it seemed the thing to do, or because they wanted to do it, or because someone else wanted them to do it. They have moved, I say. "But," you insist, "where there is a van there is a destination." Ah, *festina lente*. The limbo for movers is storage. I suppose, off-hand, that more honest attempts at complete moving have ended in the

storage warehouse than anywhere else. Here is the bunker, the trap, rather, on the course over which we are playing. Beware lest you pull into it. An older country than ours, perchance, may find in the home the ultimate depository for such chattels as have gathered round the hearth in the run of centuries; but in America it is a wise head of the house that knows all his own furniture.

Such, then, is the larger and sadder aspect of the case. The bright side, I fancy, lies in the fine display of energy involved. No person can begin to extract seven thousand cubic feet of modern miscellaneous matter from six thousand cubic feet of room, or even direct removal of the same, without sublime effort. We are all of us — the least of us — somewhat in the Herculean mold at times. And never quite so much as when moving. It is a supreme occasion. We love to rise to it.

“George, dear, will you help me with this alabaster lamp-stand?”

“Just a moment,” says George (sotto from the corner), “just a moment, till I drop the piano.”

He drops it (probably on his foot), and as soon as the air is partially clear he strides

over, magnificently, to assist in demolishing that other treasure.

“*Partir, c’est mourir un peu?*” Nonsense. George and Eleanor are merely passing from position A to position B. From all accounts, position B is larger and higher off the street. It will be a joy to move into it; and a diviner one to move out. “*Partir . . . ?*” Oh, nonsense. There is no spot in the whole six rooms hallowed by sniveling sentiment. Yon egregious inkstain on the wainscoting has not made the place more lovable. The merry gash across the door jamb is not a fond reminder of the day when they moved in amid what diminuendo of scraping crates and cases. Those trivial perforations in the wall are not dumb mouths that would cry after the gold-headed tacks which filled them and supported so gallantly the peeling oils of grandfather and Aunt Kate. Life has closed on it all forever, but there are no tears. Presently the janitor, another five dollars deep in his trouser-pocket, will venture in and painfully gather to his private dungeons the litter and terminal refuse. There are no tears. Is not that young William’s clear, treble voice, rising at the moment far down the landing, laughing aloud

in delicious anticipation of new worlds to deface?

Observe the mover. Rodin should have done him; staggering up a narrow flight of stairs, I think, with miscellany heaped high in his arms. The mover. Well we reckon him, if, indeed, we are not he. The man of small means, doing his yearly stint of one new apartment, hopping like the silly frog from one puddle of associations to another; who becomes thus, through a more or less persuasive process, a finer judge of his fellow man. And the shockingly rich, in the tranquil and easy course of their cyclic lives, swinging the circle of seasonal dwellings and establishing (in the vulgarity of the business idiom) new contacts. They will call it travel, but nearly always it is moving and nothing more. North, south, north, south; Europe, Orient, and back. For them, the life of reservations and tickets. The life of drawing-rooms and cabins, of steamer rugs and binoculars. The life of trunks, great pachyderms of travel, swallowing and disgorging their burden of silk and tweeds.

These are sad reflections, some of them. Sad to the sober minds of those who thirst for

## ON MOVING

permanency, and sad to the landlord who, a virgin lease in his cunning fingers, speeds the parting guest and baits his trap anew. A hard life the mover leads. Hard on the hands and hard on the purse; and dusty and irritating. So many important questions: to ship the dog by express or the canary by post, and who will feed them and what? And when will the water be turned off and the gas turned on? And how cold the sleeping porch is, and how hot the kitchen; and what is the exposure, if any; and who gets the room with the sun, and who the room with the view, and who just the room? And why the big rug can't go down here and not there, and why the smoke can't go up the chimney as long as there is one (the swan song of the previous tenants). And why a good many more things that don't matter, I am afraid, because in a few months we shall be moving somewhere else.



## A Trinity of Footnotes

### I

WHAT are you doing?" I asked my friend.

Slowly he turned around to stare at me. His countenance bore the impress of ineffable solemnity. In his eye were gathered all the thoughts and experience of the world that Pater so exquisitely discerned on the face of the Mona Lisa. He spoke; and his voice guttered, sibilant and strange.

"I am writing," he murmured, "in the Great Tradition." I went out, softly closing the door behind me that I might not disturb such profound and prodigious emprise.

### II

THERE is a kind of writer — shall we not call him a species? — who summons easily to hand the rich and varied observations of a galaxy of minds and sows them at his pleasure up and down the broad furrows of

## A TRINITY OF FOOTNOTES

his foolscap. We know him for an amiable scholar and entertaining pedant. We reverence him for his melic sweetness and gentle affiliation with the past. We envy him the ghostly noses he has so dispassionately rubbed. We adore him for the pertinence of his wit and the efficacy of his literary design. We are hushed to awe by the strong, viscidulous quality of his prose, raisined and jeweled at every colon with quotations bearing gifts. We never cease to marvel that under "amply billowing gown" beats so rapacious a heart, dwells so acquisitive a nature. We are amazed at his learning. But we would gladly seize him by the slack of his probably uncreased breeches and drop him over a cliff for the dastardly liar he is.

What less for a fellow who will quote with unerring accuracy lines from Bacon to Chesterton and imply the memory of a Macaulay? Who will even apologize for the slip that is not there? "Sainte-Beuve, I think it was," or "somewhere in 'Nightmare Abbey,' if I remember . . . " And you know, you *know* beyond the shadow of a doubt that not only is the book open before him as he writes, but that (worse crime) his lean, trembling fore-

### ODDLY ENOUGH

finger is spelling out and underscoring the very words of the *locus citatus*.

### III

WE were talking of critics. Said my friend: "B—— is a carping old dodger."

"Yes, he is," I assented.

"He is very destructive."

I agreed.

"He is constructive only so far as he can remain consistent with a negative philosophy."

That was also true.

"Which, in sum, is not to be constructive at all."

It seemed reasonable.

"His method is circuitous; a periphrasis, almost."

"How is that?"

"H—— writes a book. Let us suppose the worst: B—— reviews it. He generates at once a nasty, mephitic atmosphere by dragging into the light a swarm of minor defects. His next step is to question the competence of the author. Then he wonders if the whole business is not a stalking horse for H——'s ideas on evolution, or morality, or some slightly contingent dilemma. Finally, he re-



## A TRINITY OF FOOTNOTES

turns to the small flaw (armed with a magnifying glass) and like another Poe concludes in vitriolic intensity that the whole business is a rattling old carcass anyway."

A just estimate.

"He has gastritis."

I was not aware of that.

"He has had it for years."

I was moved to sorrow. Then I remembered.

"Do you know what X—— says about him?"

"No."

"He says he writes more according to his liver than his lights."



## For Children Only

NOT so awfully long ago (or once upon a time, I should say) there lived a queer little man some place or other, and his nose was very thin. I forget just how thin it was, but it was pretty thin; and it doesn't matter much, anyway, because he couldn't smell anything with it. This, of course, was very unfortunate, and you can easily imagine how sad it must have been for him to come blowing into the house of an evening and not be able to take off his hat and sniff about gingerly and exclaim: "Aha! eggplant again!" Or Swiss chard, or lettuce, or Navy beans, or whatever it happened to be. On the other hand, he was sometimes rather lucky, and the evening on which his wife left her rubber shoes to dry in the oven he didn't miss a thing. But occasions like that were rare, and most of the time he felt very depressed and discouraged. On wide, windy days he would climb the fields, thick

now with red poppies, and throw himself down in the long grass at the top of the hill and look for hours off into the bright blue distance. And the breeze, so very soft and full of all the strange, teasing scents of the valley, would find him there, and he would sniff it suspiciously. But it was only a waste of good sniffs. He couldn't honestly smell a gooseberry.

Matters went on that way for quite a while, and all his seven sons grew up and went out into the world and got licked or married, or both, according to how old and how good they were. All except the seventh and youngest, that is, and he was indeed very successful. As I remember it, he slew two or three prominent dragons, including the most important one who had been hanging around the princess's tower for weeks. And the little ant that he carefully didn't step on led him to the old stump where all the pearls were, and so they were happily married (he and the princess, I mean). But you are wondering, of course, what all this has to do with the young lad's father, who couldn't smell a dragon if it were fried in onions. As a matter of fact, I have been won-

dering myself, for I am just a little bit mixed. It is very vexing. I was afraid of it in the beginning, for I never wrote a story just like this one before, particularly on Christmas eve. And besides, these things — these dragons and princesses and queer old men who can't smell — all happened so long ago that it is awfully confusing to have to sort them out. They are a whole lot like people and animals and ants and bean-stalks jumbled up in a grab-bag, and when the person who is telling the story reaches in for a wood-cutter or a bear or whatever he needs to complete his tale, what does he get? He gets an old snaggle-toothed ogre, or a little girl who has been changed over night into a black raven, or a squash pie that can talk. So how can I be expected to get things just right? "I can't." Of course I can't. I am glad to hear you say that. It's a wonder to me how so many good fairy tales ever came to be written, anyway. They just grew, I suspect.

But I know now what was wrong. Little Helen has just run in to inform me. It seems that I didn't tell his name right off, at once (as of course I should have done). You can't be too careful about these things. Here I had

this old chap with a thin nose which didn't do him the slightest bit of good, and I let him get away from me in the second paragraph just because I hadn't told his name. I don't see how I could possibly have forgotten that. It has a great deal to do with the story; almost everything, as I see it now. For it isn't an ordinary name like Jones, or Twickenham, or Sir Galloway, or Custard, or John Silver. It is "The Man After Six." He told me so himself.

"Who are you?" I asked suddenly. (I didn't realize he was there; and besides, I was tying my shoe.)

"Hello," he answered, and stood looking at me a long while. "I'm The Man After Six."

"What does that mean?"

"Don't you really know?" he said solemnly. "You've heard your mother say a hundred times 'It's after six.' Well, *what's* after six? Why *I* am, of course."

It seemed very strange to me. But still, he couldn't smell anything, and I thought it would be impertinent for me to ask him more about it. So I put him carefully back in the story where he belonged, and told him on my word of honor that when I was through

## ODDLY ENOUGH

writing just one or two sentences more, and had looked up all the hard words to see if they were spelled correctly (for they never are) I would go to the printer and see if he could fix it up so that such a celebrated person as A Man After Six might be allowed to smell just one little thing when he came home this Christmas eve. And the printer generously offered to let him have a whiff of the ink bottle. And, for all I know, he did.



## The Summer Boarder

HE does not sit in secret, measuring by the round flyblown figures on a calendar a good year old the pitiful duration of his holiday. I have often wished that he did: that he might hide himself away, like Dickens' Marchioness, in some dark backward and abysm of the farmhouse where his weak, blue eyes could not encounter mine. Pardi, he does not sit in secret, but visibly on the peopled porch, rocking in the company of stout, elderly ladies as if the fall of evening depended upon it.

I have seen him so early that the robins were still testing the resiliency of worms, and the starlings, their yellow legs and beaks so sharp against the feather, were still soberly tracking the thin and crystal dew. I have seen him with his weekly paper or with an old copy of "David Harum" (and once with "Prester John") assume, above the railing's edge, the noisy impertinent stare under which shall pass the file and order of the day's

events. His reading does not matter. For hours I am sure he will not turn a page, so impatient and avid is he, after Chaucer's host, of the passing pageant. To contemplate if not the happy highways at least the stretch of macadam a dozen yards distant, he need not, unlike the Lady, take its clear toll in the parlor glass. No spell, I fancy, has ever held him, unless it be that by which he has been damned so long to stool and ledger. It is probable, rather, that in his dusty remove he sees all year so little of life that he must now appoint the confident eye to consider and evaluate so much of it as it can.

It is he who is largely responsible, in the season of his sins, for the chill and odor which attach to the name he has been given. Had I in my brief period of æstivation to bear with him through the long verandah'd forenoons, I should straightway go mad; not, I reason, so much on account that I should be obliged to share his simple annals, as on the chance I should be considered one of his kind. So strange and peculiar a derision, it is, which rises at the sound of *the summer boarder!* How old the breed may be, I have no sensible idea: older far than that noble New England



## THE SUMMER BOARDER

doctor who sat as a wise Sophist in the midst of several; older far than my grandfather's youth which, out of the duties and demands of the ambiguous life of the clergy, fared far afield and braved intimate contact with landlord and tenant. Older, perhaps, than the Chow period of civilization or the legendary dynasts of Thibet. But I must not dwell on times I know naught of, but on what, amid the clean Freedom hills of New Hampshire, I have found, as Peter found the fishes in the sea, in abundance. I found him in New Hampshire, and I knew forthwith that he was not a specimen but a genial prototype.

Just specimens is all New Hampshire has,  
One each of everything as in a show-case  
Which naturally she doesn't care to sell.

How amply could I agree with Robert Frost who wrote those lines had he, in the measure of his blank verse, named as the eloquent exception the rising industry of the state. I mean, of course, the summer boarder.

Many times, a grave, melancholy Larmartine, I have caught myself on the verge of venturing anew into another of those fragrant New England hallways where, with a bit of inquiry and peremptory small talk, I might

be admitted to the family circle and deemed again one worthy to share an opinion on the current weather and to pass, with the ample reach of a Tantalus, the blueberry muffins. But on the thresholds, resolute and firm, I have always paused: content, so be it, to let the memory of a previous excursion lie undisturbed. For the future (if my will remain iron) shall nevermore decant the curious and visible delights of such consorting. Having seen him once, openly, in the shelter of his choosing, I shall rest patient in the assurance that I may behold him now and again on country lanes and byroads as I speed safely past his creaking chair.

Had I to christen again the village most familiar and beholden to the summer boarder, I should choose the calm, liquid name of *Mamble*. Mamble, it should be, not so much because it is in actuality a "town of lazy token," as John Drinkwater has poetically called it, but because it reminds me vaguely of that oppressive physical lethargy to which my boarder has so completely surrendered. He is lethargy itself. There is no exercise, apparently, that he may take. There is none, if I read him straight, that he desires. He

## THE SUMMER BOARDER

was known on one occasion to steal across the village green to the partially shaven lawn of the Inn and to disport himself clandestinely with as much as eighteen holes of riotous *clock* golf. But nothing ever came of it, and I daresay he never went so far again. Yet I am wrong. Perhaps a dozen evenings this last summer he has been caught with a certain lady trying for the fifth consecutive time to get through the middle wicket in a friendly game of croquet. But this was late in the evening, after the supper dishes had been cleared away leaving a large raspberry stain on the tablecloth almost precisely where he had, not a moment since, been sitting. You are not likely, however, to find him thus engaged; yet if you should, he would pause, wherever chance uncovered him, and turn to scrutinize your person as thoroughly as if you had come heralded upon him behind the vine-circled column at the head of the front steps.

I have made him a pathetic figure, I am afraid, like the pale anæmics drifting through the pages of some of Mr. Maugham's later novels. To be sure, he *is* pathetic, and when I knew him and sat with him three times a

day at table, he was pathetic beyond belief. He tricked me into sympathy. On a hundred occasions I had wished to see him joying in some benign triviality — if it were no more than the upsetting of a pot of bad tea or no less than the dipping of a swallow “along the river’s light.” But I never found him, would he talk, with other than some banality on his thin lips, or, when silent, with more gesture and understanding than a half-lifting of the unmajestic brows. Endlessly rocking, I pitied him myself, and offered him once the pictorial section of the *Times*. But he would hardly have any of it, and preferably, it was plain, not from me. So I forebore ever addressing him again, except to inquire after the position of the salt; nor did I, when I later read for the first time “The Passing of the Third Floor Back,” experience the twinge of uneasy conscience which by all rights should have been mine. So he has passed for me into the symbol I have here made of him, and the vision of his presence has *dwindled* (as I saw it in an Irish poem) to the peering and the blatant appraisal of a pair of weak, blue eyes. Perhaps I am unfair: but I have a grievance.



## The Obituary

A MAN may be rightly said to have achieved fame if his obituary notice is on file in a respectable newspaper office while he yet lives and breathes. Hard things have been said of editors. They are, in general, a brutal and unconscionable lot. But if their splay-foot treatment of poet, author, and artist should appear their worst crime, let us cry and cry again, "It is not so. *Never!*" By the visible signs of their unworthy profession (the wastebasket and the printed rejection slip) we know them for the breed they are. It is, however, only by the secret processes of their trade that we may definitely link them with the devil, and of such perhaps none is more astutely insidious than the writing of previous obituaries. Killing a man (for the files) before he is dead. "Slaying the living," Professor Saintsbury has called it. A cruel practice, indeed; a monstrous anticipation, a wicked fore-rustle of the winding sheet.

Have you (reader) among chance acquaintances, encountered Death's soulless historian, the necrologist? He is a dry, spare fellow, of uncertain age and eye, with a bilious complexion, a stoop, and small, elliptical glasses. As a young man he moved about in the sweet haze of Copyopolis, and wrote on love and murder and the blue Swan Boats. Perhaps he became a city editor and "bawled the Absolute" across his frightful chambers. But that was long ago. Poor fellow, he slipped down the ladder. And now, on the bottom-most rung, no longer a-tremble at that which went but a foot before, he fills out the span of his days with brief chronicles of the dead and gone. Death's literary executive, and the editor's most affirmative "yes-man."

He knows his job desperately well. And because he can see the Edge, and hear the drip of eternal waters, there is the ring of death in his very inkpot. He has slain many, and without compassion. He has slain in anticipation. He has slain cleanly and breathed the last Amen. But he has slain, too, with a certain cunning and intrigue. His notices are rarely stained with all the Truth, however sweet or bitter. He has a remarkable faculty

## THE OBITUARY

for omitting the most important things in a man's life and summing up all the trivial. He is not averse to ascribing also certain untruths and fictive degrees and inappropriate honors. A Harvard man (when he is dead) may, through one of these genial inversions, appear as Yale '79, and the incalculably immense wrong go forever unrighted. Unrighted, that is, unless a strong-minded and resolute son shall unsheathe the family sword and storm the den of infamy in Newspaper Row. But even then the satisfaction is personal and the world will still have muttered not in vain: "*Aha*, so he was a *Yale* man, was he? Well, *that* accounts . . . etc.," into the lower strata of remarks. Within limits, the less famous a man really is the better chance he has of surviving this fifth lustrum and appearing in the public prints with a respectable or even flattering list of achievements. Mr. Feraldi, from having been an associate of the Apple Valley Produce Club, becomes mysteriously *president* of the A. V. P. C.; and his intimates discover that instead of running unsuccessfully at the last election for the town council (as they all suspected, and even voted) he had been chairman of that body for

years. He is also, in the bargain, "survived by a wife, who was Miss so-and-so, and three children," though to all Christian purposes he has continually led a blameless and bachelor existence. It is in the last item that certain intelligent souls discover that of course this obituary belongs to the eminent Mr. Fernald (*not* Feraldi) who was seen not ten minutes since smoking a Don-Don cigar along the city's main thoroughfare, and whose delightful biography apparently crossed with the other in the ponderous files of the Apple Valley *Pippin*.

In the matter of foreign decorations our necrologist is very miscellaneous, and his theory of award, extravagant and strange. Every year certain of his clients receive in their obituary notices the Order of the Rising Sun (Japan), the Order of the Blue Moon (Anon), or the Carnegie Medal. For this there is no charge, and the members of the deceased's family are regularly surprised and secretly overjoyed. It is the one error that is never corrected. It is a point upon which International Law has nothing to say. Many foreign powers (including the Scandinavian) are quite unaware of the extent of their recog-



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nition and the liberality of their bestowals. It is not too much to think that the day will come when the governing boards of some of our colleges and universities may seek out this evasive and impartial judge, and on his advice select the recipients of the annual announcement windfall of honorary degrees. If a man is to be an LL.D. after death on an inside page of a daily paper, he might as well enjoy the privilege alive and conscious. It is only fair. We Americans are too prone to shout only after the grave is closed. Let us go to the necrologist and find out about these things, and then shout a little with him just before. Even though we shout some lies.

That the writer of obits should *lie* is scarcely strange. I am not much of an etymologist, but surely the affinity of *necrologist* and *necromancer* is close. In both cases the man is dead, and whether you romance about him or tell the facts amounts after all only to a distinction of terms. John Harrow is dead. Poor John. Let us reconstruct his life:

### JOHN HARROW IS DEAD

John Harrow, who had practised medicine in Peterton for the past forty years, died late last evening at his home at number 36 Briar Road. He was a graduate of ———, and took his medical degree at ——— in 1884. Two years later he moved

to Peterton. He was a member of the State Board of Health and of the Association of American Physicians. He is survived by his wife, who was Miss Caroline Dean. They had no children.

A comfortable life, we see, and a passionately dull one. Were I a necrologist I should instanter and very properly be dissatisfied with it. I should want to dress it up. To give poor old John Harrow the position and honor in life he deserved. True, the material to work with is slender; but a chicken does grow from an egg, albeit a good one. I don't like to think of Harrow as an egg. I like to think of him not only as a figure in his town but as a man of national importance; a credit to his colleges, to Peterton, and to the world that bore him. Besides, the editor (so the copy-boy informs me) is very anxious for a front-page obit for the noon edition. H'm. Let us see:

#### JOHN HARROW, *FAMOUS PHYSICIAN*, IS DEAD

John Harrow, who had practised medicine in Peterton for the past forty years, and *who had an international reputation, not only as a physician but as an orthopedic specialist, an eye, ear, nose, and throat man, and an authority on psychiatry*, died late last evening at his home at number 36 Briar Road. He was a graduate of ———, *where he took highest honors in ballistics, and received his medical degree from ——— in 1884, magna cum laude. For the next two years he pursued his studies in London, Berlin, Vienna, and at various Biergartens, under such well-known men as Schnitzler, Trübbler-Trübbler, Schlach, Wyndenholmondelay, and others. Then he moved to Peterton, where for a while he was an interne in the Hill and Dale Hospital. But he was much too good for that. He began an independent practice in 1888 and within a few years had risen to a high place in his*

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*chosen profession. He was the head of the National Board of Health, the Old Ladies Home, the State Insane Asylum, and an 80-man at golf; a director of all kinds of medical organizations, a member of all kinds of learned bodies, including the Royal Acad., and several other things. He had received twelve honorary degrees, including ones from Columbia, Princeton, Dartmouth, Brown, Yale, Harvard, Vassar, and Bryn Mawr. He kept his medals in the upper bureau drawer. He is survived by his wife, who was Mrs. Caroline Dean. They had five children.*

The free use of italics will make clear the general change and expansion in my second notice. A good, sound thing. Untrue, but sound. *There* was a life worth living, honor worth having, and some solid satisfactions to drape piously upon the tomb. And an excellent report of it. A man like Harrow is worthy of more than a hemistich, and John, could he read what I have said, would be pleased. His wife will, anyhow. Harrow was apparently at least her second husband (though it is curious I didn't notice that before). And they did have children. Five, to be exact. One of them, I suspect, is a boy.

He will perpetuate the name.



## A New Desk

**M**Y desk is no longer new; but it *was* last year, and I really meant to write about it then in its pristine stage, only somehow strange papers kept piling up on it and there was a continual confusion of letters to be signed, and business kept on interfering with literature (like “madness risen from hell,” as Swinburne says), so it never was done. Of course, even then it wasn’t really new. A desk, like a Strad, is mellowed solely by years: if not under alien chins, at least under other and unknown elbows. Many a lad, I gather, has leaned on mine, for its underpinning is far from sound, and I can easily detect, after a little dusting, where the varnish has been worn away at the front.

It is small and squarish and light, my desk, and comes under the general heading of roll-top, though, for all of me, it stands fair and open night and day. There is some foot-room underneath and, disposed on either side of my

legs like a pair of comfortable saddle-bags, are two flights of drawers. When I espied it first — for it was tendered me and I did not choose it — I could not help thinking how ill it measured up to the courtly dimensions of my old one. So (I thought) changing a job is simple business compared with changing desks. The risk of one is small; the risk of the other, colossal. On the first depends your livelihood, but on the second your chances of sleep and uninterrupted dreaming. My previous desk had been long, wide, and spacious. I could cock my feet up on it admirably, monarch of all I essayed, and there I read or slept with equal ease and satisfaction: if not to my employer at least to myself. I saw at once, however, when I was shown my new desk, that I could never sleep there. It was too high to get my feet on, and had no room for them if I did. And still it was not so high at the gables that I could not see and be seen across its top. This was another misfortune. A desk should be big enough to conceal you adequately, else how can you be idle with an easy conscience? One cannot sleep in the presence of work; and so I knew that I should be miserable. I am.

But my new desk had one improvement, and one which I greatly admired and admire even at this very moment: it had no end of pigeon-holes. These are of several sizes and shapes and would not be at all suitable for an ordinary pigeon even if he cared to live there, which he likely wouldn't. But they are noble vaults in which to lose things. I suppose, incidentally, that it is a good many years since pigeons lived in desks. It must have been a quaint custom, what with the constant billing and cooing and perpetual restlessness of the bird. Of all that, only the billing remains; and I see one now from the tailor who seems to want his money. Trot away, tailor. I am doing an article to pay the butcher.

Indeed, though, these pigeon-holes are the saving grace. Nineteen of them, I make it, stuffed and bulging with things I want and can't find; when I am tired of work or surfeited with sleep, I contemplate them and wonder if I shall ever have the courage to disinter their treasures. I would as soon plunge a hand into De Quincey's tub. . . . Whenever a man comes into the office and gives me his card I shove it quickly into a

pigeon-hole and feel happily assured that I have safely sponged him out of my life forever. That is, if he will only take his hat and go. This is something of a ceremony with me which the uninitiate could not possibly understand.

"What is your telephone number, Mr. Smith?"

"Circle, 75757."

"Thank you very much. You will hear from me in a week."

But he won't, for ere he is cleared the door-sill with his heels I have thrust the unblotted card into a dark recess; and when it emerges with the millennium I shall not know what Circle 75757 stands for or why I wrote it. And perhaps Mr. Smith will wonder. Which is more than I shall ever do.

Then there are those singular and sporadic moments of a busy day (laughter), when you edge forward in your chair and sprawl, head upon arms, into the very lap of the desk. I learned the trick in college: I saw it for the first time during a philosophy lecture. I remember that I couldn't quite reason whether my young Achilles was really sulking boldly in his tent, which seemed excessively

rude, or whether he had openly surrendered to anguish. I half expected to see him rise with tear-stained eyes at the close of the hour. But he told me he was only resting. *Resting!* I cherish the habit and practise it religiously at my desk. It is the only way I can keep out of sight.

This leads, quite normally, to the act of awaking. I open my eyes suddenly after such an innocent spell (at the sound of my name, it may be), and there under my nose, like the gimcracks of a toy bazaar, lie the impudent familiars with which I work. The spindle is bent and threaded with all shades of paper and memoranda indicating nothing. There are several estimate sheets, but estimating *what* I cannot say. There is an address of somebody, whose name is a myth, decorated with some of the designs one finds on the telephone pad. There is a handy tray full of paper-clips which I straighten out industriously as I work. I have straightened as many as half a box in a day. Some of them are awfully stiff, too. There are several corners of old envelopes with good stamps on them waiting to be steamed off. I must have the janitor bring me some steam: he shoves a



little into the pipes in winter, he tells me, though I have always taken it for hot water and noise.

The ink-bottle is also "at hand," as we say in a business letter; but "on hand," as I look at them, would be more correct. How green is the blotter on which I write. I can just make out a letter on it, looking-glass style; it seems to run on incoherently:

Expect		pay you next
fortunately		not pay
now	thanks	trouble
		Yours,

And a very large and undignified signature. I must stop leaving around such testimony of my sloth. Isn't it about time for a new blotter? A red one. . . . There is not much in these papers, and I have answered some of the letters: all but the one in French. Dammit! Why did he have to write in French? But best of all a copy of the *Saturday Review*, the *Illustrated London News*, *Poetry* (an odd place for it) and some books. "Lolly Willowes"—I have just bought it and fear I shall not work this afternoon — some essays by E. V. Lucas which I found, I remember, for fifty cents; "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" — I

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brought that down to look up something: the mellowing of the Strad, perhaps — and a first of W. W. Jacobs, bless him! So this afternoon I shall sit at *Jordan*; didn't I tell you that I call my desk *Jordan*? (Roll, Jordan, roll!) And simulate an attitude of labor.

“Yes, sir, you can indeed.”

“Thank you.”

“And what is your telephone number, Mr. Jones?”

“Hancock 9999”. . . .

Need I say more?



## The Philosophy of Ceilings

IT is about time that something was said on the general subject of ceilings. Hour after hour, as a child, I lay in quiet and profound contemplation of a number of them, for they were practically the only thing that I could view continually with any degree of composure. They never annoyed. Their uniform blankness was one with my state of mind. I cannot say now with any certainty how much those ancient plaster surfaces influenced my early life. A great deal, though, I expect.

I remember one in particular. It supplied the top to my nursery. Right above my crib appeared a curious combination of two or three cracks and a large water-stain dating back to a Saturday night when Delia overdid it in the bath on the floor above; a beautiful calcimine creation with four humps and prominent elbows, trekking across a fly-specked desert. It was a good thing, in its way, and

diurnally came in for a bit of solid contemplation. Today, no doubt, I should call it a camel, but at that period of my interesting life camels were wholly unknown. I had never been to Arabia or Ringling, nor was I permitted to indulge in the æsthetic and gastronomic delights of animal crackers. Practically speaking, I had no teeth.

Dimly associated with my yellowing friend is a less important stain. In the light of modern science I should suppose it to have been a spot of casual gravy, but at the time I accepted it as a part of the Eternal Pattern of things, especially ceilings, and immediately adjusted it in my memory as a rather creditable if malicious face. I can still recall it. How dreadful it was! It used to leer at me over my bottle, and had a nasty habit of forming the basis of the most horrible nightmares whenever the old digestion decreed a slack day. It seems incredible that I should remember so much of a season when I was scarce a year old. But who can disprove me? When the memory is cross-examined for the real facts of our childhood there is a delicious backsliding and a fine conflux of years. I find it quite as easy to pull up recollections

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of the so-called bottle era as of the most ambitious college days. Easier, in fact . . . When I was three, the ceiling was redone; and the presence, along with him of the several humps, passed damply away under the glistening swaths of the calcimine brush.

We pay a lot of attention to our hats. And yet they cover only one head at a time. A ceiling, on the other hand, simultaneously covers several (without imposing the least restriction on anybody), and often a lot of atrocious furniture as well. But who cares about it? A ceiling is no more to us than a necessary partition in space: necessary to keep the feet of the fellow higher up from treading on our ears. Who (I repeat), beyond babies, cares for ceilings? Not the artist. The nearer his picture comes to being skied the madder he is. Not the advertiser. Visually (but not otherwise) he will meet you on the level. And not you; and not I.

For my part, I have always felt that ceilings were made, more than anything else, to exhibit the strange capacity of the fly to walk upside down. Before there were any ceilings where did the common house-fly obtain that exquisite exercise which keeps

him fit to dash round the rim of the cream pitcher and explore the difficult area of Uncle Arthur's whiskers? I confess I do not know. But as things stand now, ceilings are the proving-ground of flies. Squads of them may be observed there any hot, June morning, manœuvring about in great solemnity; learning new tricks, I dare say, practising approach shots for the jam pot, and the proper cadence for use on a bald head. The ceiling is also their refuge, and a wounded or disappointed fly will seek it quicker than the flypaper. He seems assured that none will pursue him there. And certainly I shall be the very last to do it. Almost anything in its proper place is an *ornament*. A bear in his den, a foot in a shoe, a fly on the ceiling, for example.

Of course, some ceilings are more attractive than others. Italian ceilings are situated in the vicinity of the clouds, and by their mysterious isolation inveigle us into looking at them. Of course, too, there is "the vault of heaven," and "the canopy of stars," and all that sort of natural protection which the poets talk about. No one is fonder than I of a good, cheerful summer sky, if my hay fever isn't too bad and I can find a white duck hat

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around the house that will fit me; nor of a starry night, for that matter, if you'll stick to the main road. But I was speaking, rather, of the artificial ceiling, such as King Alfred sat under; the common sort, that has for centuries covered impartially emperor and clown. There's the one in the kitchen. Nobody in his right mind, to be sure, would look twice at that. But consider the one in the bathroom, which is not half the size. That is the one ceiling in the whole house with which I am quite familiar. Lying in a temperate bath, I have made a study of it. I have played (mentally) a game of chess on it; and once, when I was younger, I hit it with a wet sponge, trying to kill a mosquito. I missed him.

Public places have the decorative instinct toward ceilings. You have surely noticed it. The dome of the Grand Central Station in New York is littered with stars of various magnitudes and lively representations of the Olympus family in striking poses. All in all, it is one of the most satisfactory blue-prints of the heavens I have ever seen. The motive there is a simple one. It is the generous desire of the officials to make the traveler perfectly

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at home with the universe, so that a small journey in Upper 5 (and porter, call me early!) to Chicago will seem like nothing at all. Or relatively nothing. And there are the hotels. I have seen hotel ceilings (in the dining rooms especially) so incrustated with cupids and cherubs and Rubens-like damsels reclining heavily on thin air that I have buried my face in the soup in sheer confusion. Not for the world, in some places I know, would I turn my eyes aloft. "*Look up, not down.*" Poppycock. A good wall is enough for me. My crib days are over. If there is something to be seen, don't hang it over my head like a sword of Damocles. Put it where I can view it face to face. Even the Bible will bear me out in this. Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall, not on the ceiling. You don't want a stiff neck, do you? No? Well, neither do I.











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